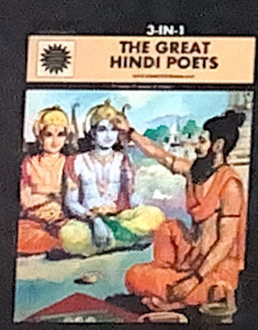
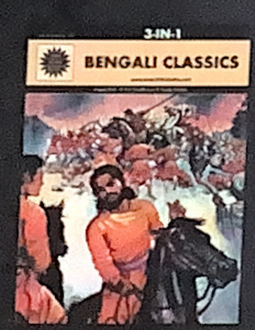
POET-SAINTS OF INDIA

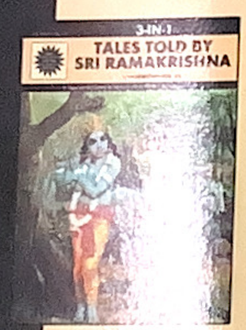
3-IN-1

Tukaram was neither a Brahmin nor a scholar and yet his *abhangs*, or devotional songs, are an integral part of living Maharashtra.
Born in Tiruvarur, Tamil Nadu, Tyagaraja is considered one of the world's greatest musicians. His way of devotion was the way of music. His chosen deity was Rama for whom he spurned even the patronage of rulers.
The word 'Harijan' (people of God) that Gandhiji used for referring to those unjustly labeled as lower caste, was a word coined by Narsinh Mehta, the poet of Gujarat. A devotee of Krishna, Narsinh closed his eyes to the world around him and opened his mind only to the music of his devotion.
Amar Chitra Katha tells the stories of these great poet-saints of India.

OTHER 3-IN-1s:







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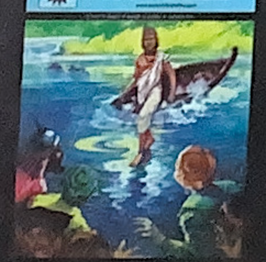

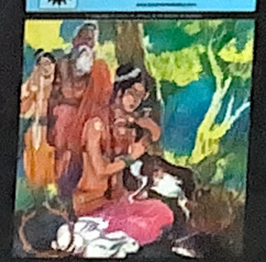

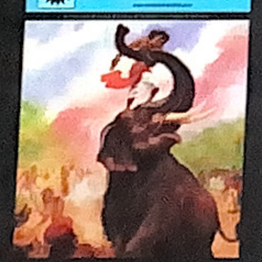

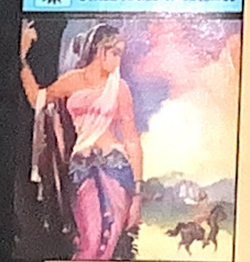

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"Amar Chitra Kathas are a glorious tribute to India's rich cultural heritage. These books have been an integral part of my children's early years, as they have been for many other families across India. Comics are a great way of reaching out to children, inculcating reading habits and driving their quest to learn more about our roots."

- NARAYAN MURTHY, CHIEF MENTOR, INFOSYS

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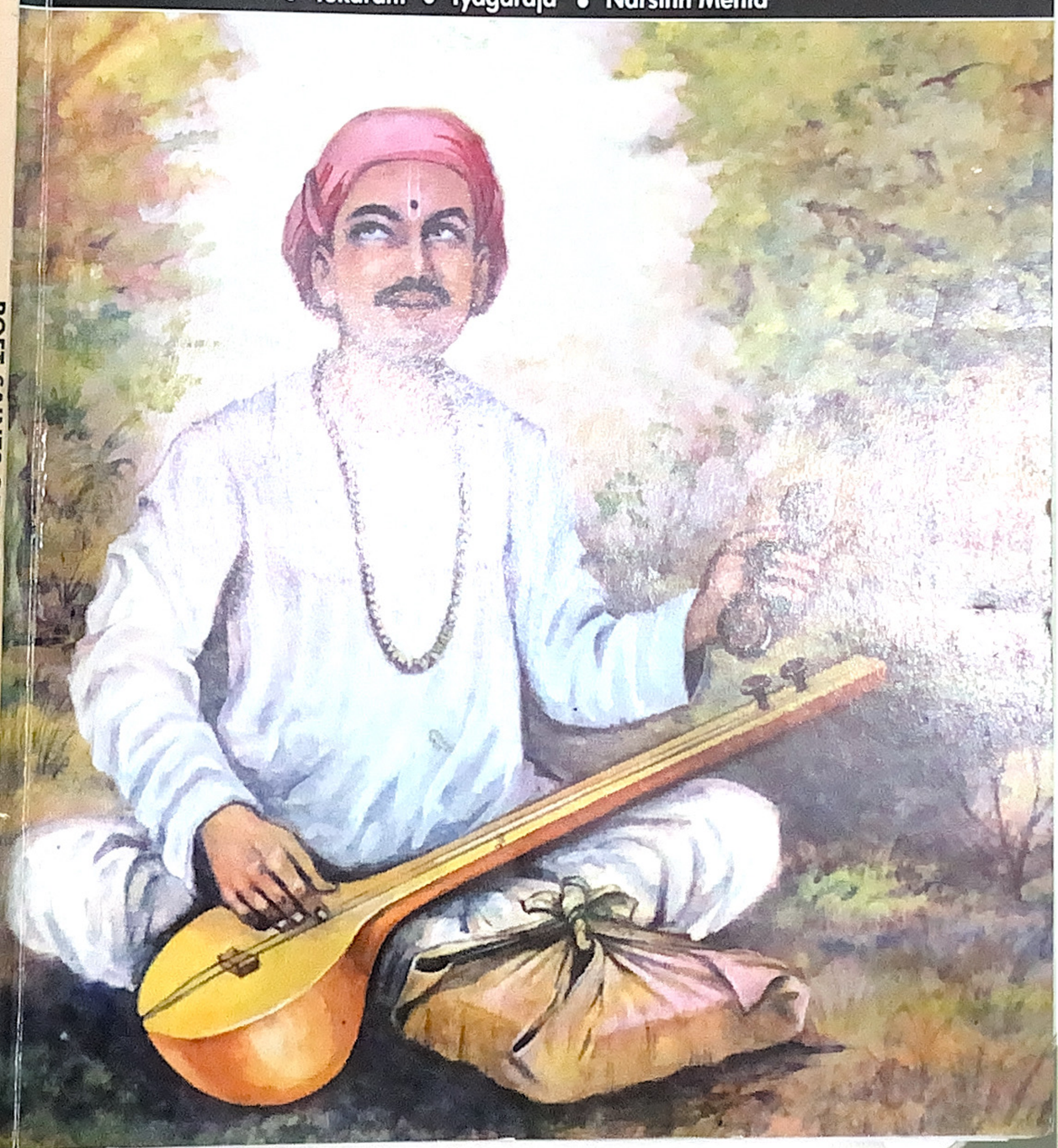

The route to your roots

Founder Editor: Anant Pai

TUKARAM

Maharashtra has an enviable legacy of mystics and saints. And almost all of them were of very humble origin. Perhaps the most revered of them all is Sant Tukaram, who was neither a Brahmin nor a scholar. In fact he worked as a shopkeeper for much of the early part of his life. However, it is his very commonness that makes him an inspiration for us all.

Tukaram's path to spiritual enlightenment was not easy at all. He had to fight human frailties, like pride, anger and desire. It was his sustained effort and unflinching faith that helped him complete his journey.His greatest asset was his poetry. The simplicity of his verses, while conveying grand ideas, have made his Abhangs an integral part of our heritage.

This story of Tukaram is based on popular legends and not on any one particular version.

Script : Kamala Chandrakant

Illustrations : Prabhakar Khanolkar

Editor : Reena I. Puri

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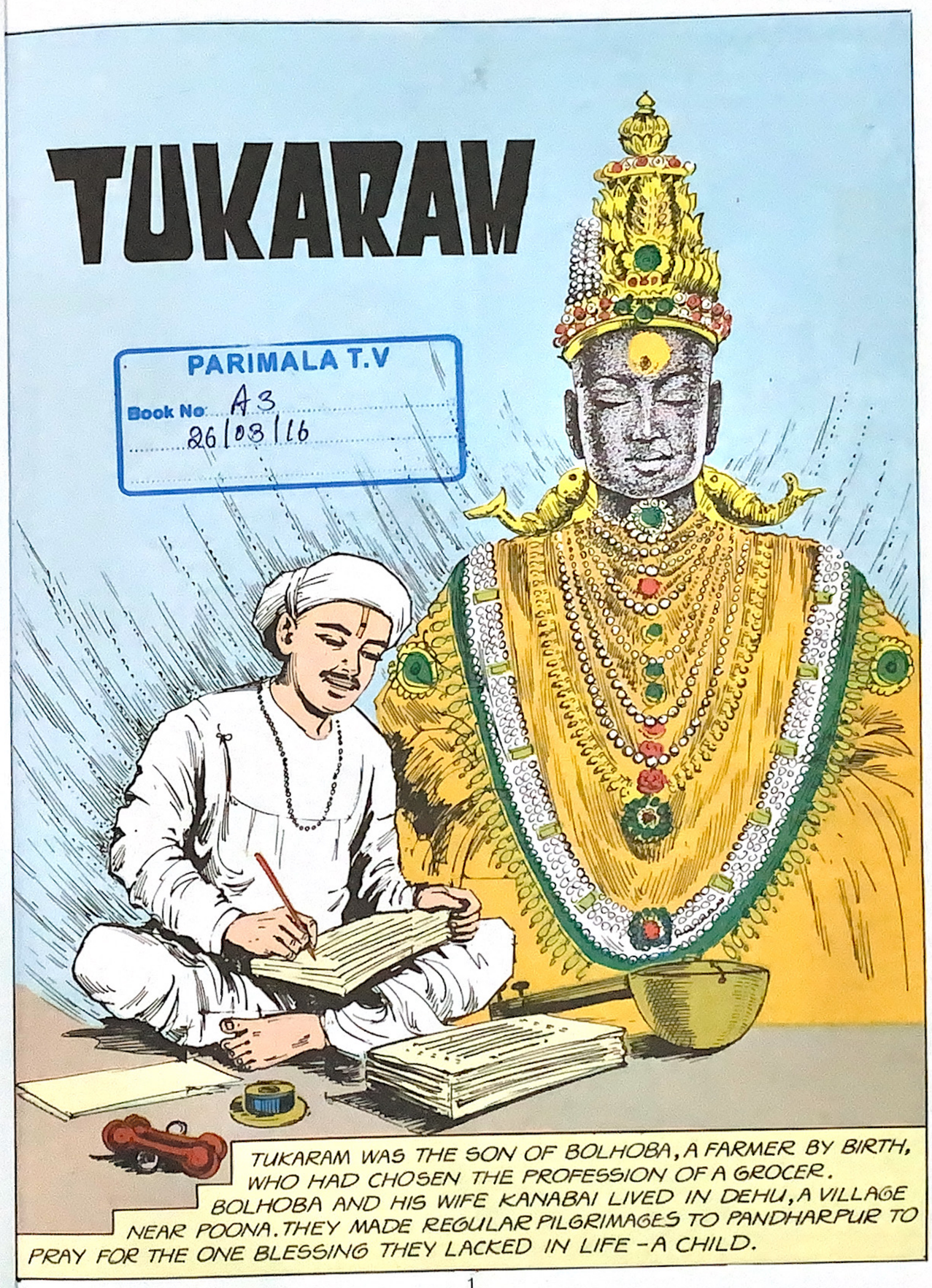

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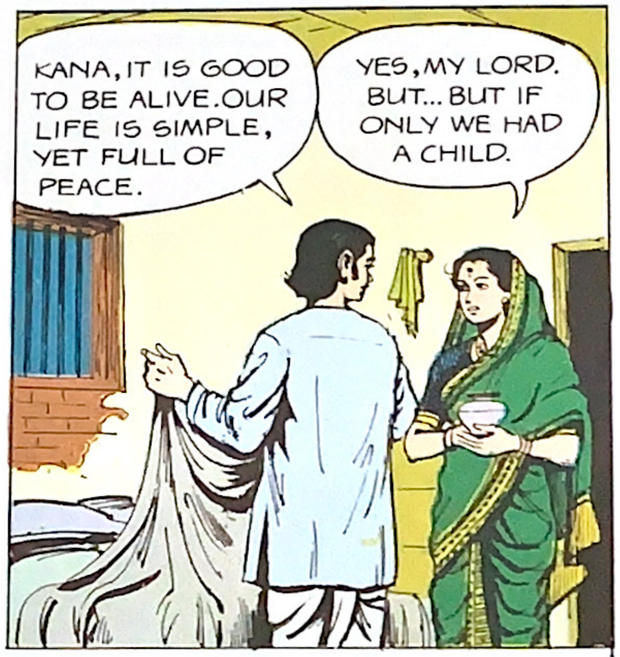
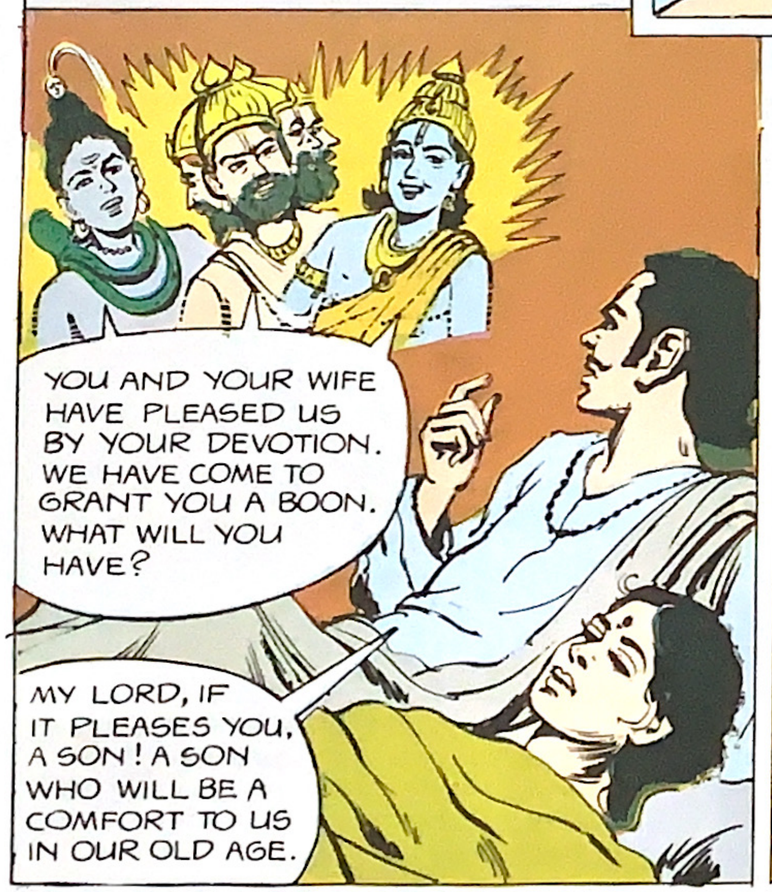
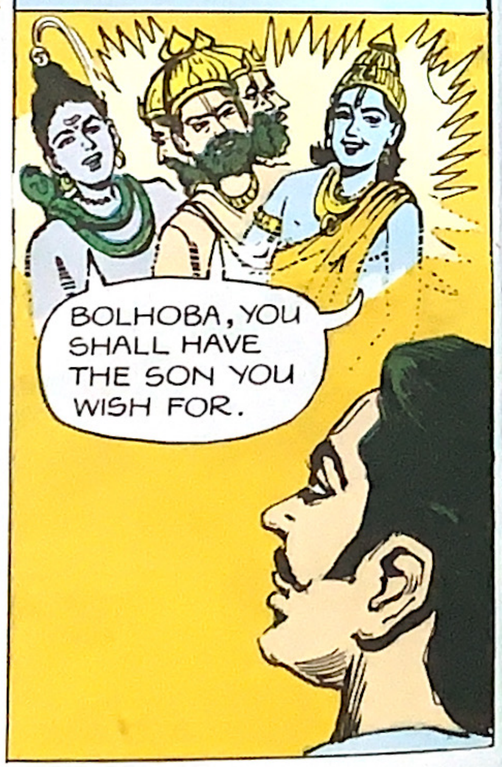


THAT NIGHT, BOLHOBA'S FAITH WAS REWARDED. SHIVA, BRAHMA, AND VISHNU CAME TO HIM IN A VISION.

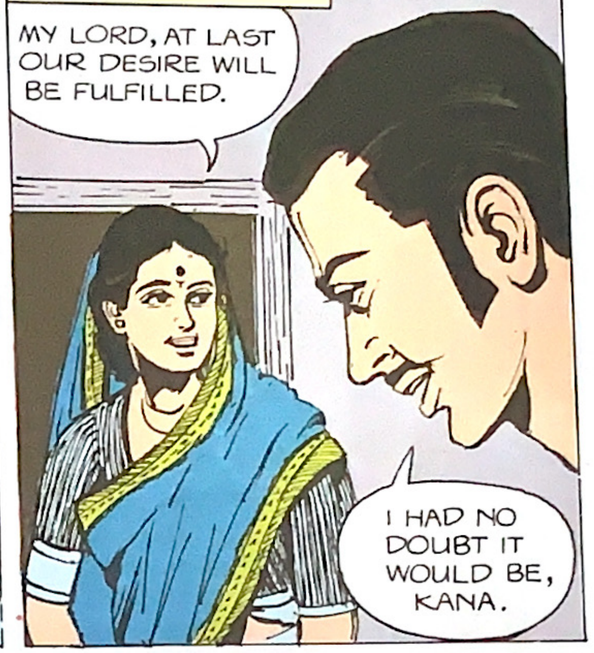


THE DEVAS WERE SILENT FOR A WHILE. THEN—

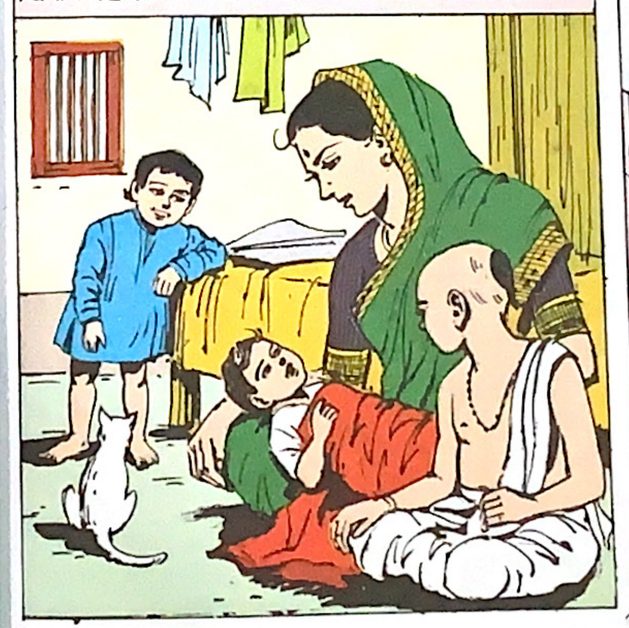


BOLHOBA COULD NOT CONTROL HIS EXCITEMENT.

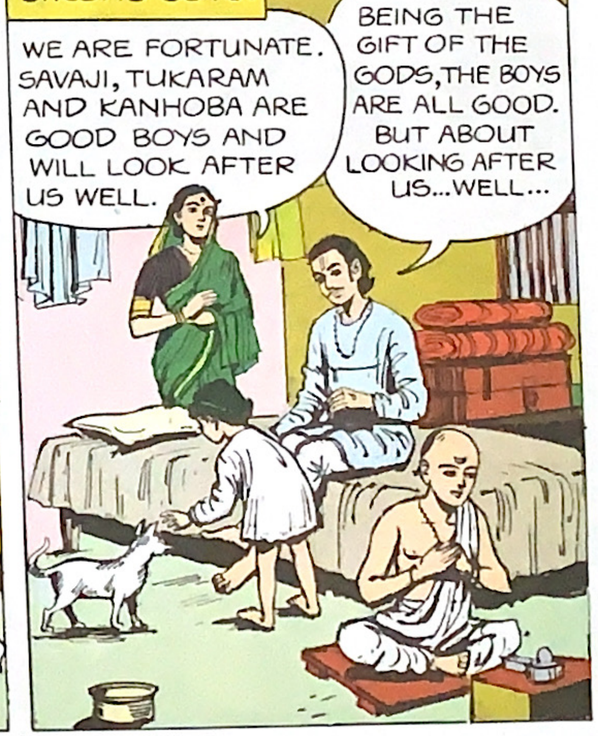
WHEN KANA WAS FULLY AWAKE, BOLHOBA TOLD HER IN DETAIL ABOUT THE VISION.

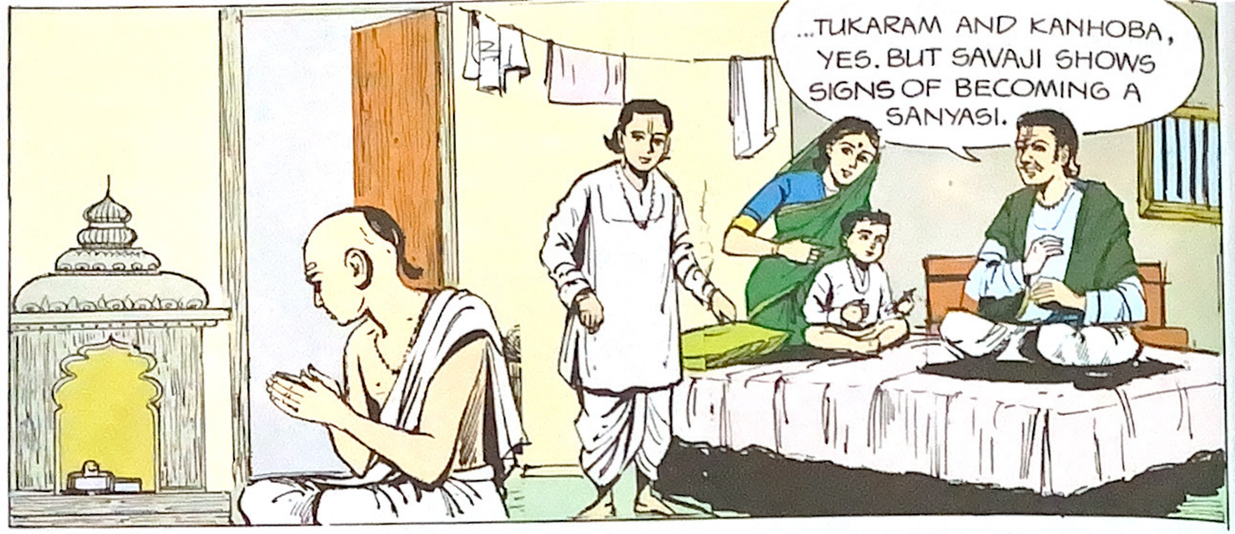


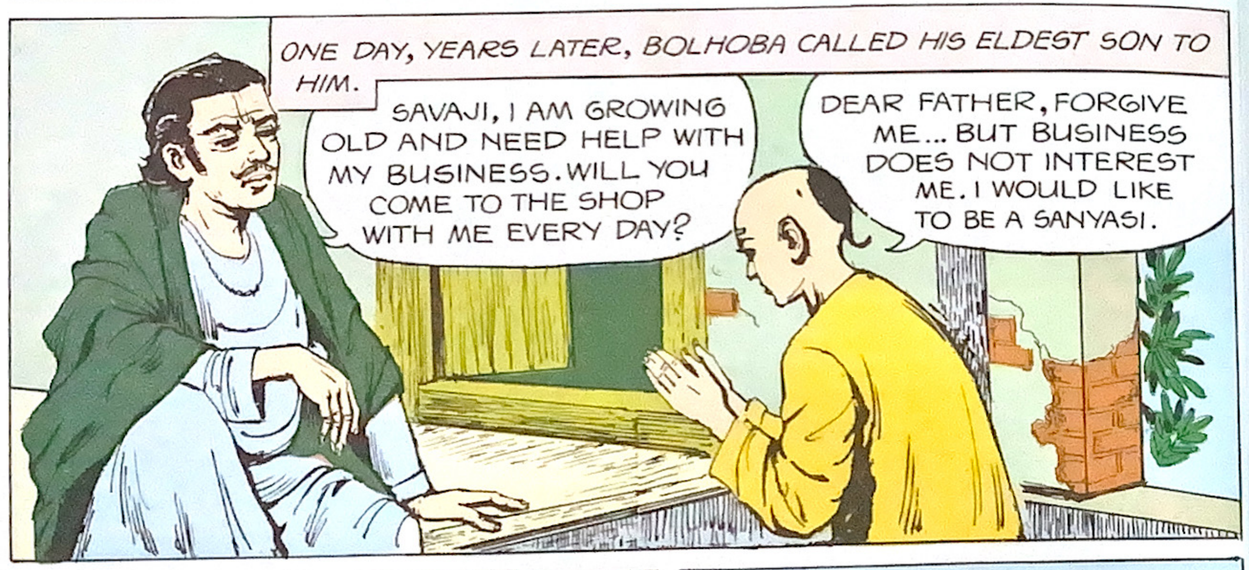
AS EACH OF THE THREE GODS HAD PROMISED, KANA IN DUE COURSE WAS BLESSED WITH THREE SONS— SAVAJI THE GIFT OF SHIVA, TUKARAM THE GIFT OF VISHNU; AND KANHOBA THE GIFT OF BRAHMA.

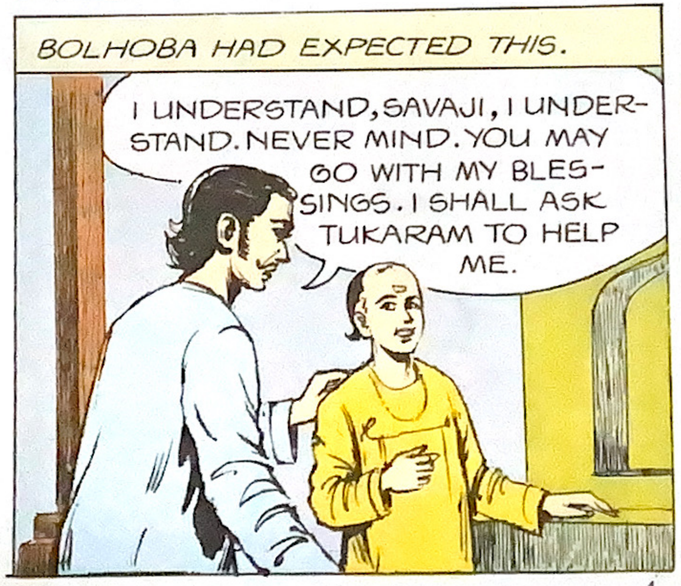


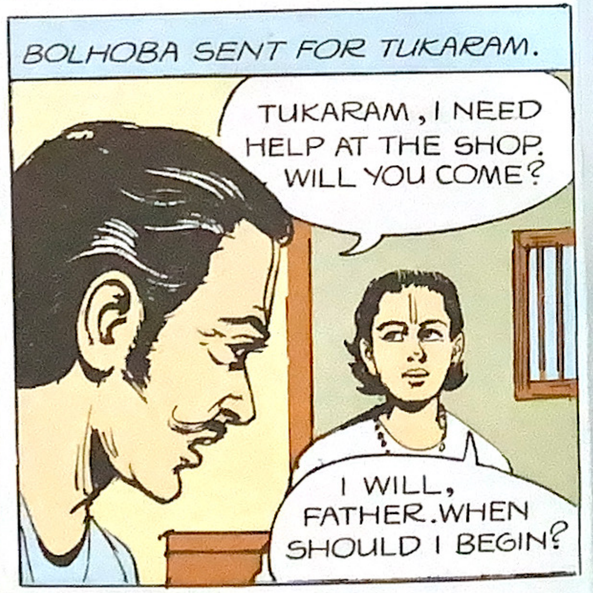
THE BABIES SOON GREW UP INTO STRONG BOYS.



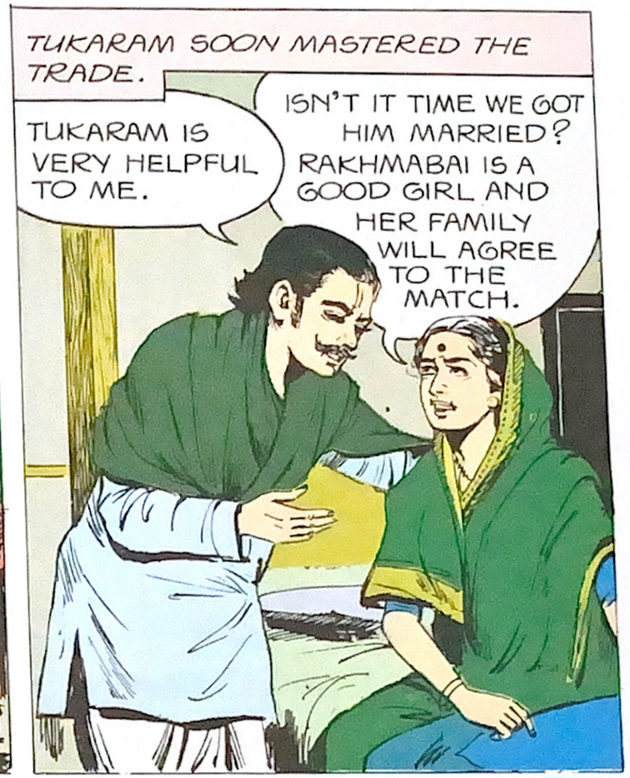

...TUKARAM AND KANHOBA, YES. BUT SAVAJI SHOWS SIGNS OF BECOMING A SANYASI.

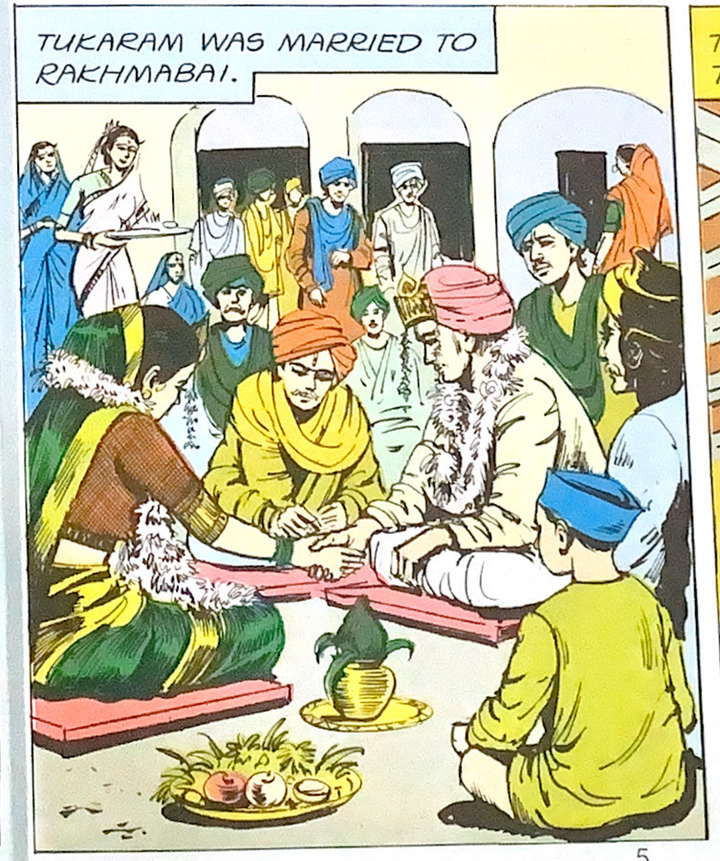

ONE DAY, YEARS LATER, BOLHOBA CALLED HIS ELDEST SON TO HIM.
SAVAJI, I AM GROWING OLD AND NEED HELP WITH MY BUSINESS. WILL YOU COME TO THE SHOP WITH ME EVERY DAY?
DEAR FATHER, FORGIVE ME... BUT BUSINESS DOES NOT INTEREST ME. I WOULD LIKE TO BE A SANYASI.

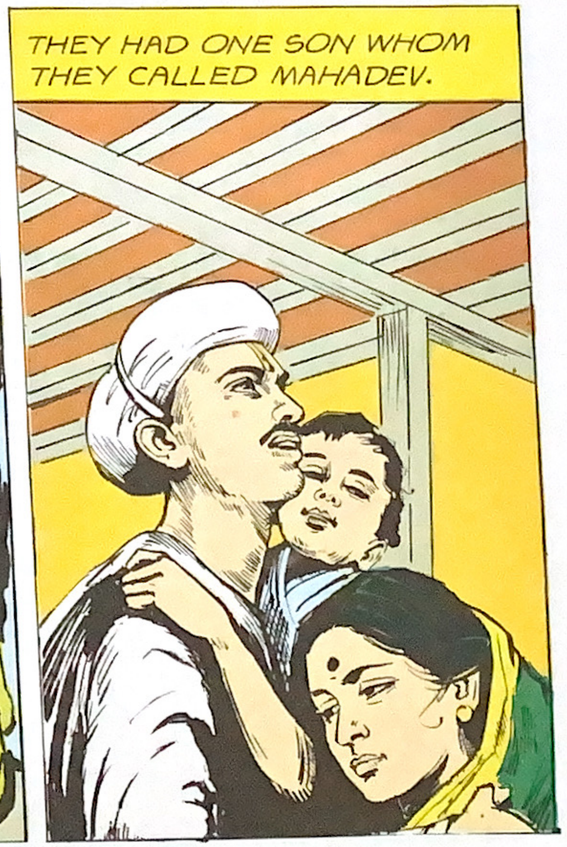

BOLHOBA HAD EXPECTED THIS.
I UNDERSTAND, SAVAJI, I UNDERSTAND. NEVER MIND. YOU MAY GO WITH MY BLESSINGS. I SHALL ASK TUKARAM TO HELP ME.


BOLHOBA SENT FOR TUKARAM.
TUKARAM, I NEED HELP AT THE SHOP. WILL YOU COME?
I WILL, FATHER. WHEN SHOULD I BEGIN?

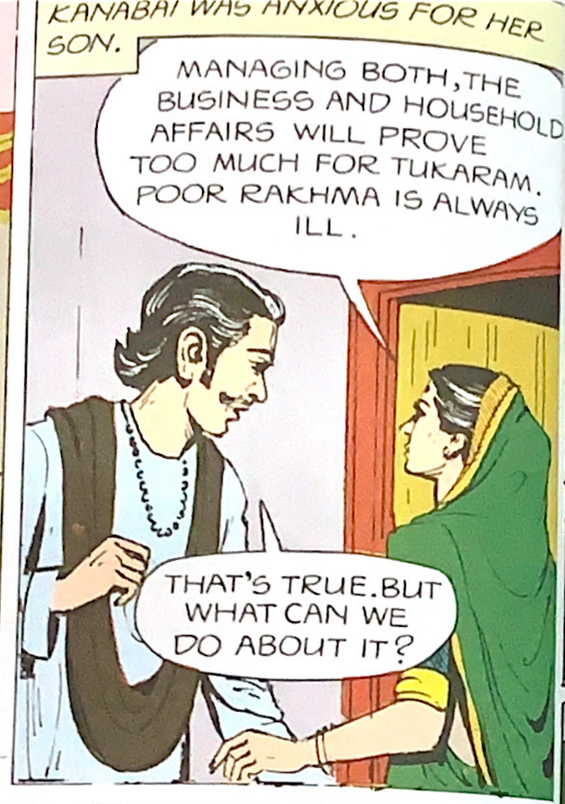
BOLHOBA WAS HAPPY. ALONG WITH TUKARAM, HE SET OUT FOR THE SHOP.
I SHALL TRAIN YOU TO BE THE BEST GROCER IN DEHU.

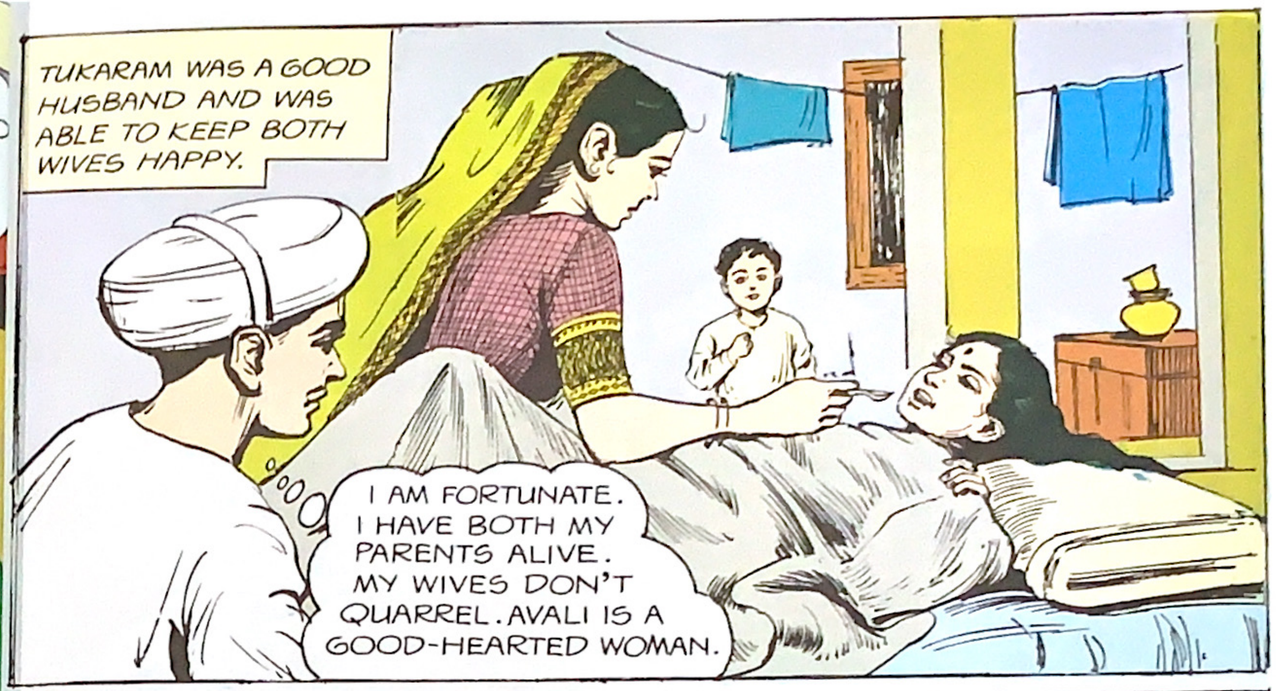

TUKARAM SOON MASTERED THE TRADE.
TUKARAM IS VERY HELPFUL TO ME.
ISN'T IT TIME WE GOT HIM MARRIED? RAKHMABAI IS A GOOD GIRL AND HER FAMILY WILL AGREE TO THE MATCH.

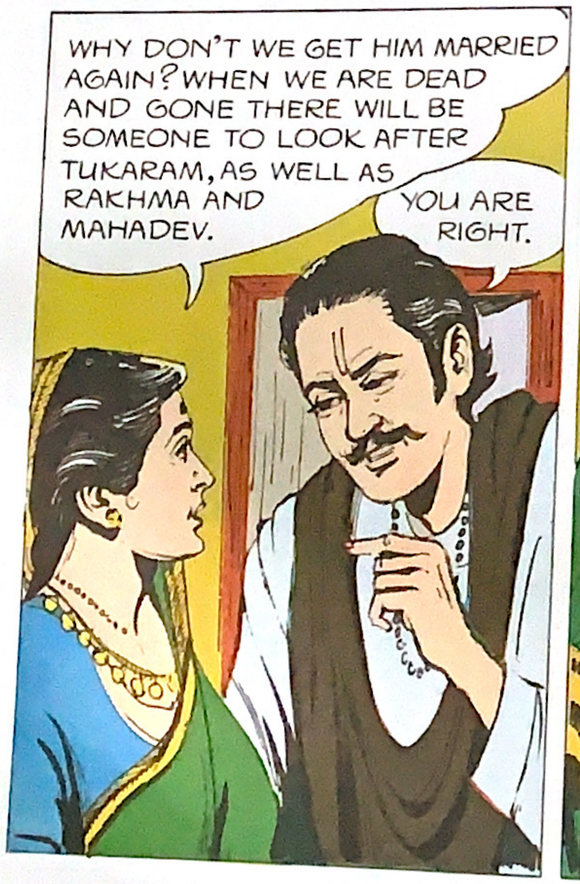

TUKARAM WAS MARRIED TO RAKHMABAI.

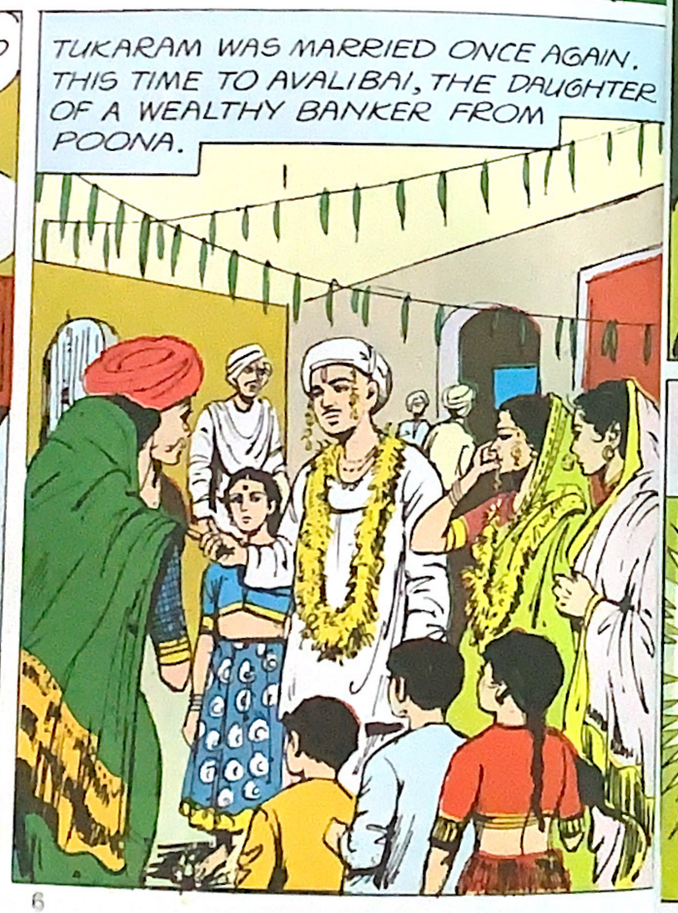

THEY HAD ONE SON WHOM THEY CALLED MAHADEV.

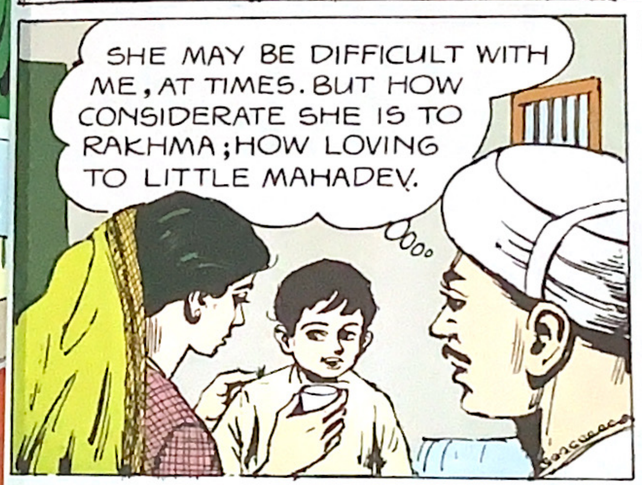
BUT RAKHMABAI, UNFORTUNATELY SUFFERED FROM ASTHMA AND WOULD BE BED-RIDDEN FOR MONTHS.

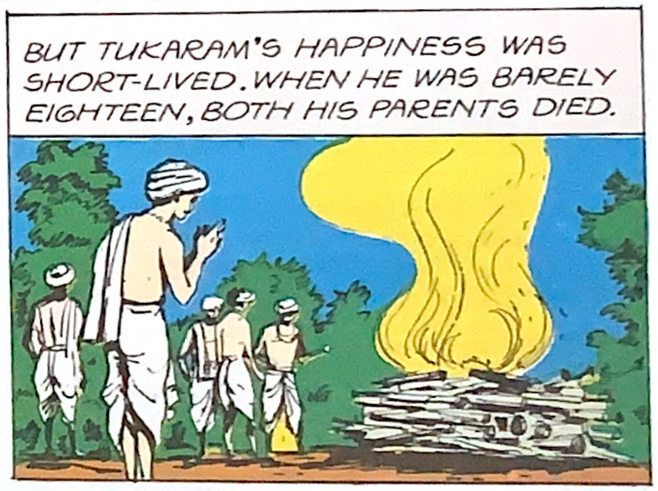

KANABAI WAS ANXIOUS FOR HER SON.
MANAGING BOTH, THE BUSINESS AND HOUSEHOLD AFFAIRS WILL PROVE TOO MUCH FOR TUKARAM. POOR RAKHMA IS ALWAYS ILL.
THAT'S TRUE. BUT WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

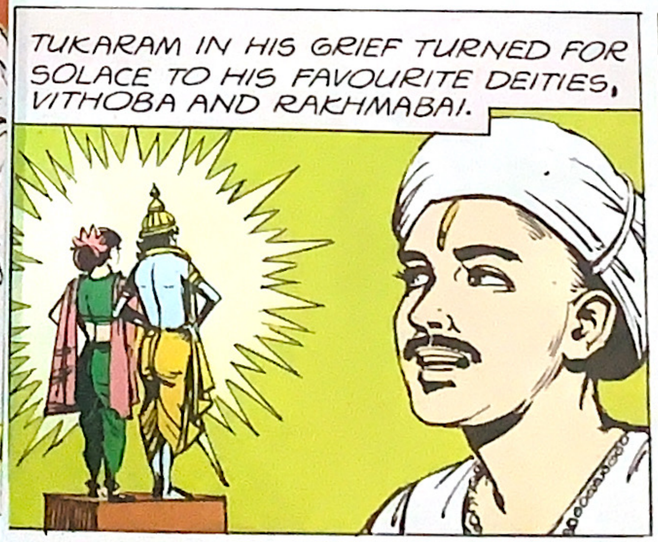

TUKARAM WAS A GOOD HUSBAND AND WAS ABLE TO KEEP BOTH WIVES HAPPY.
I AM FORTUNATE. I HAVE BOTH MY PARENTS ALIVE. MY WIVES DON'T QUARREL. AVALI IS A GOOD-HEARTED WOMAN.

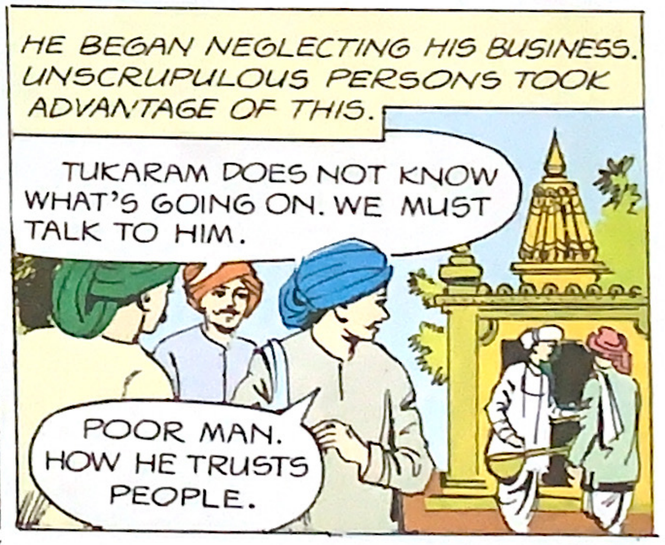

WHY DON'T WE GET HIM MARRIED AGAIN? WHEN WE ARE DEAD AND GONE THERE WILL BE SOMEONE TO LOOK AFTER TUKARAM, AS WELL AS RAKHMA AND MAHADEV.
YOU ARE RIGHT.

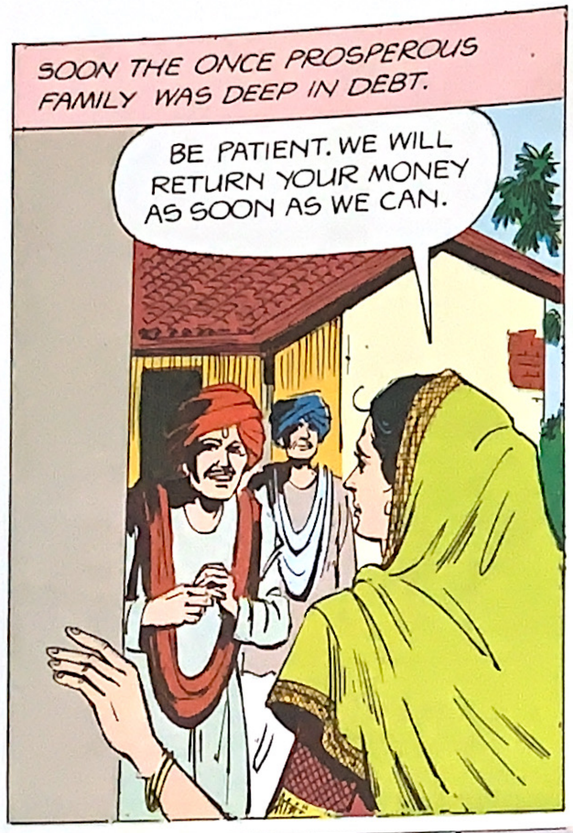

TUKARAM WAS MARRIED ONCE AGAIN. THIS TIME TO AVALIBAI, THE DAUGHTER OF A WEALTHY BANKER FROM POONA.

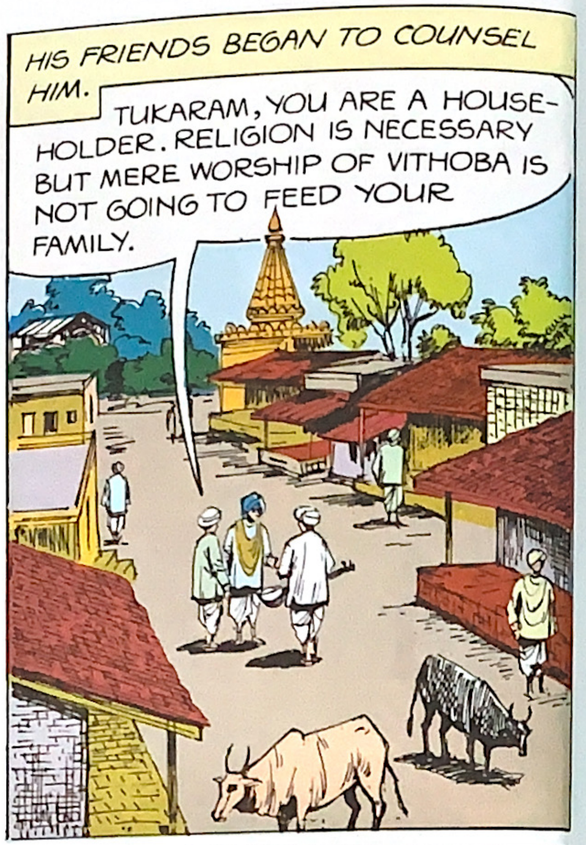

SHE MAY BE DIFFICULT WITH ME, AT TIMES. BUT HOW CONSIDERATE SHE IS TO RAKHMA; HOW LOVING TO LITTLE MAHADEV.


BUT TUKARAM'S HAPPINESS WAS SHORT-LIVED. WHEN HE WAS BARELY EIGHTEEN, BOTH HIS PARENTS DIED.

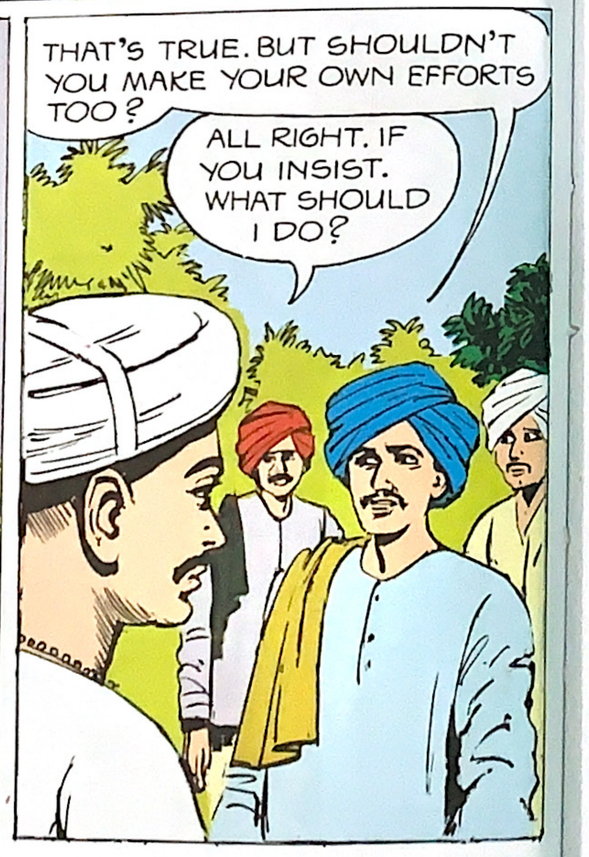

TUKARAM IN HIS GRIEF TURNED FOR SOLACE TO HIS FAVOURITE DEITIES, VITHOBA AND RAKHMABAI.


HE BEGAN NEGLECTING HIS BUSINESS. UNSCRUPULOUS PERSONS TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THIS.
TUKARAM DOES NOT KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON. WE MUST TALK TO HIM.
POOR MAN. HOW HE TRUSTS PEOPLE.

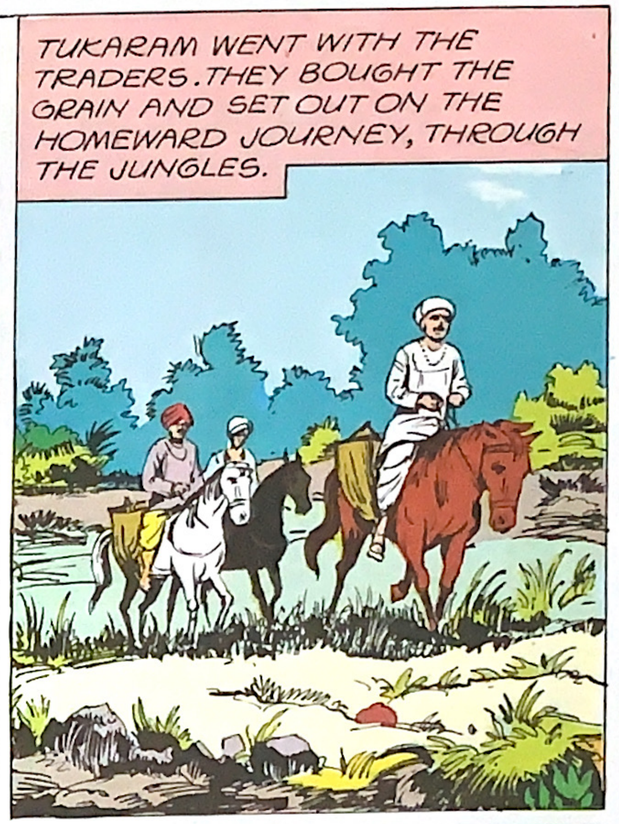

SOON THE ONCE PROSPEROUS FAMILY WAS DEEP IN DEBT.
BE PATIENT. WE WILL RETURN YOUR MONEY AS SOON AS WE CAN.


HIS FRIENDS BEGAN TO COUNSEL HIM.
TUKARAM, YOU ARE A HOUSE-HOLDER. RELIGION IS NECESSARY BUT MERE WORSHIP OF VITHOBA IS NOT GOING TO FEED YOUR FAMILY.

YOU ARE WRONG. VITHOBA WILL CERTAINLY COME TO MY AID IF THE NEED ARISES. RIGHT NOW IT ISN'T NECESSARY.


THAT'S TRUE. BUT SHOULDN'T YOU MAKE YOUR OWN EFFORTS TOO?
ALL RIGHT. IF YOU INSIST. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

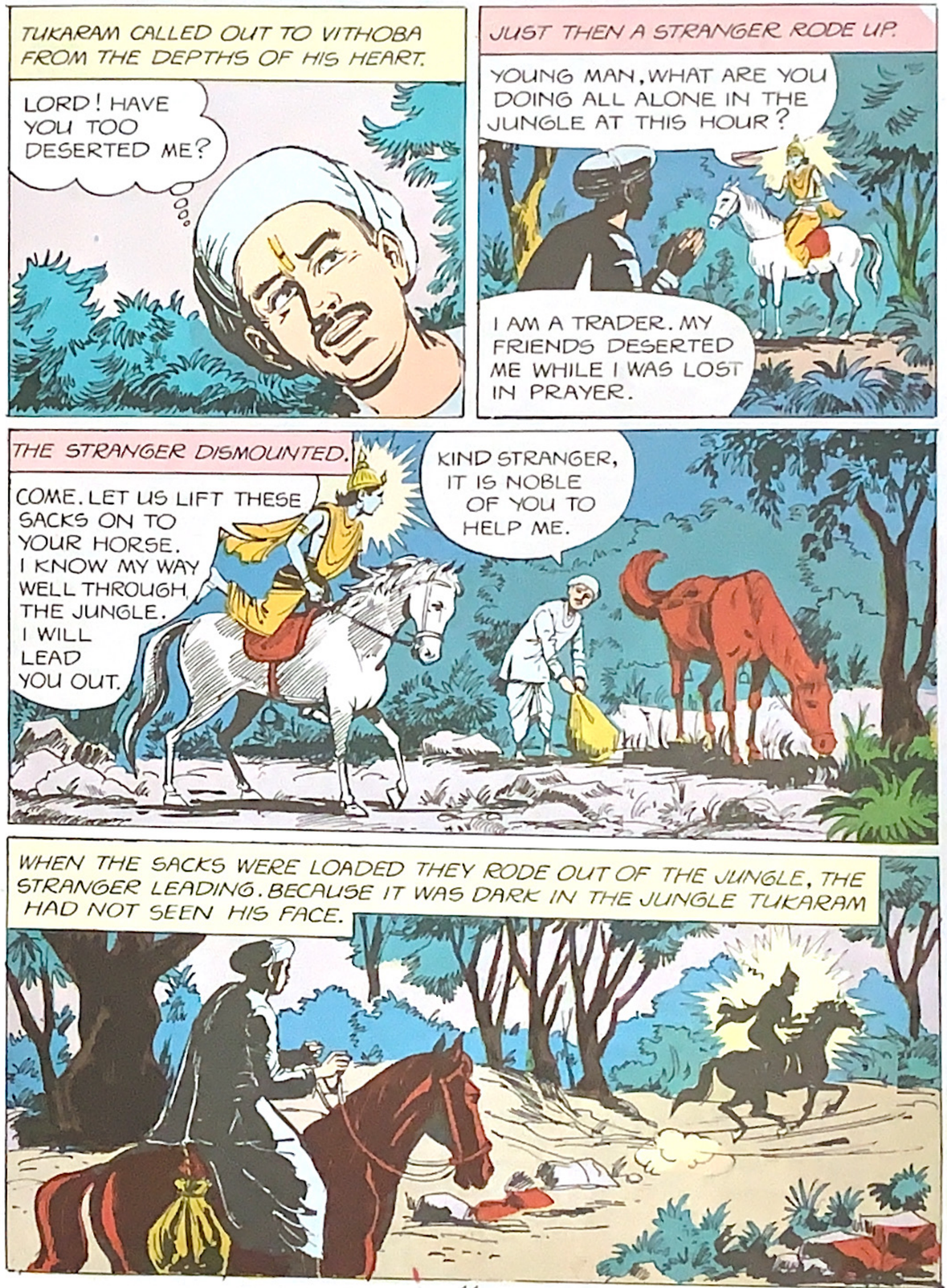
WE ARE GOING TO A FAR-OFF MARKET TO BUY GRAIN WHICH WE WILL SELL AT DEHU. WILL YOU WORK WITH US ON THE DEAL?
YES, IF YOU WANT ME TO.


TUKARAM WENT WITH THE TRADERS. THEY BOUGHT THE GRAIN AND SET OUT ON THE HOMEWARD JOURNEY, THROUGH THE JUNGLES.

ON THE WAY, TOWARDS EVENING, TUKARAM BROUGHT HIS HORSE TO A HALT AND DISMOUNTED.
WHAT IS THE MATTER?
IT'S TIME FOR MY EVENING PRAYERS.

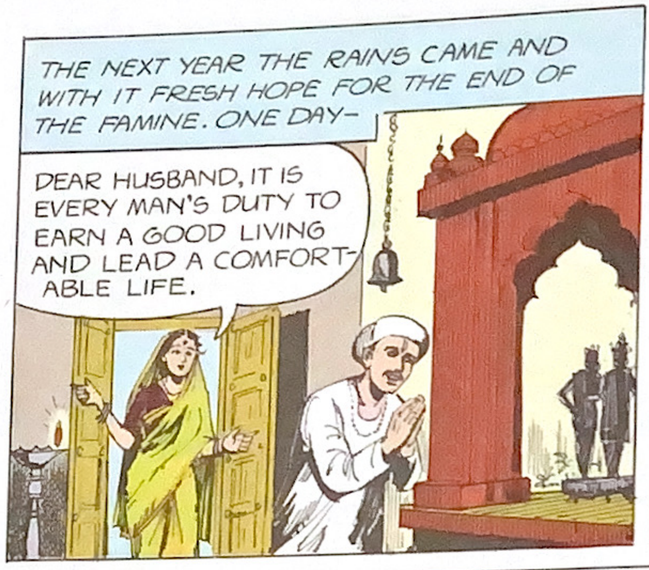
HIS FRIENDS WERE ANNOYED.
THIS IS NO TIME FOR PRAYERS. IT WILL SOON BE DARK AND THESE PARTS ARE DANGEROUS. COME ON, FOLLOW US.

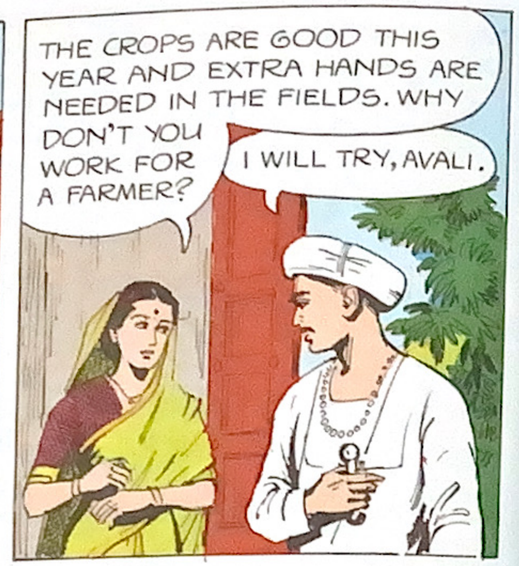
BUT TUKARAM HARDLY HEARD THEM FOR HE WAS ALREADY DEEP IN PRAYER.
HE IS A FOOL. COME ON, LET US LEAVE HIM WITH HIS PRAYERS AND HIS GRAIN TO THE MERCY OF THE JUNGLE. OUR FAMILIES HAVE TO BE FED.
WHEN TUKARAM FINISHED HIS PRAYERS, IT WAS VERY DARK.
MY FRIENDS HAVE DESERTED ME!
SUDDENLY A STREAK OF LIGHTNING LIT UP THE JUNGLE.
THERE WAS A CLAP OF THUNDER AND THE RAIN CAME DOWN IN TORRENTS.
HIS HORSE REARED IN FEAR AND THE HEAVY SACKS OF GRAIN FELL OFF ITS BACK.

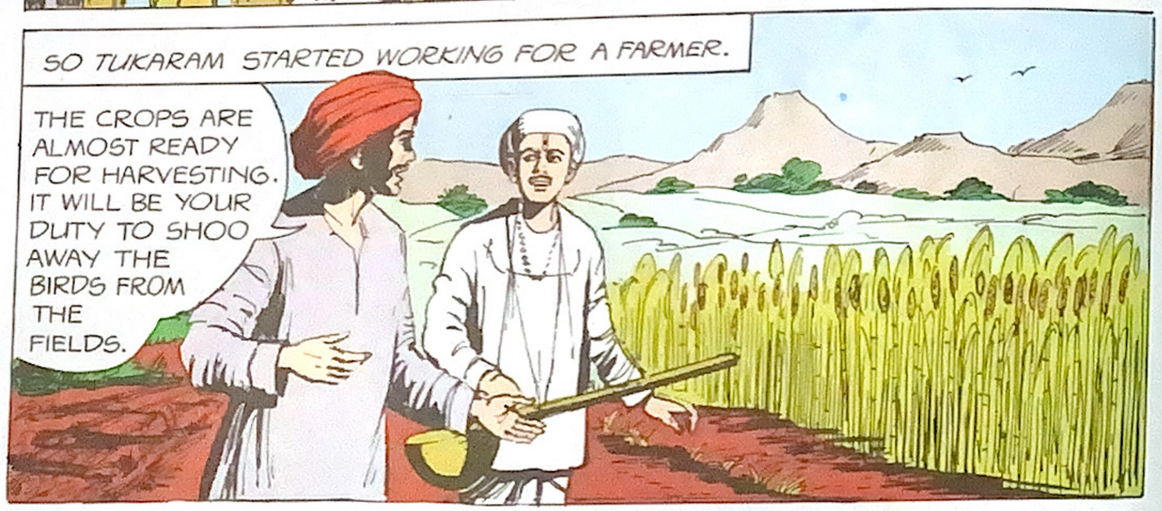

TUKARAM CALLED OUT TO VITHOBA FROM THE DEPTHS OF HIS HEART.
LORD! HAVE YOU TOO DESERTED ME?
JUST THEN A STRANGER RODE UP.
YOUNG MAN, WHAT ARE YOU DOING ALL ALONE IN THE JUNGLE AT THIS HOUR?
I AM A TRADER. MY FRIENDS DESERTED ME WHILE I WAS LOST IN PRAYER.
THE STRANGER DISMOUNTED.
COME. LET US LIFT THESE SACKS ON TO YOUR HORSE. I KNOW MY WAY WELL THROUGH THE JUNGLE. I WILL LEAD YOU OUT.
KIND STRANGER, IT IS NOBLE OF YOU TO HELP ME.
WHEN THE SACKS WERE LOADED THEY RODE OUT OF THE JUNGLE, THE STRANGER LEADING. BECAUSE IT WAS DARK IN THE JUNGLE TUKARAM HAD NOT SEEN HIS FACE.

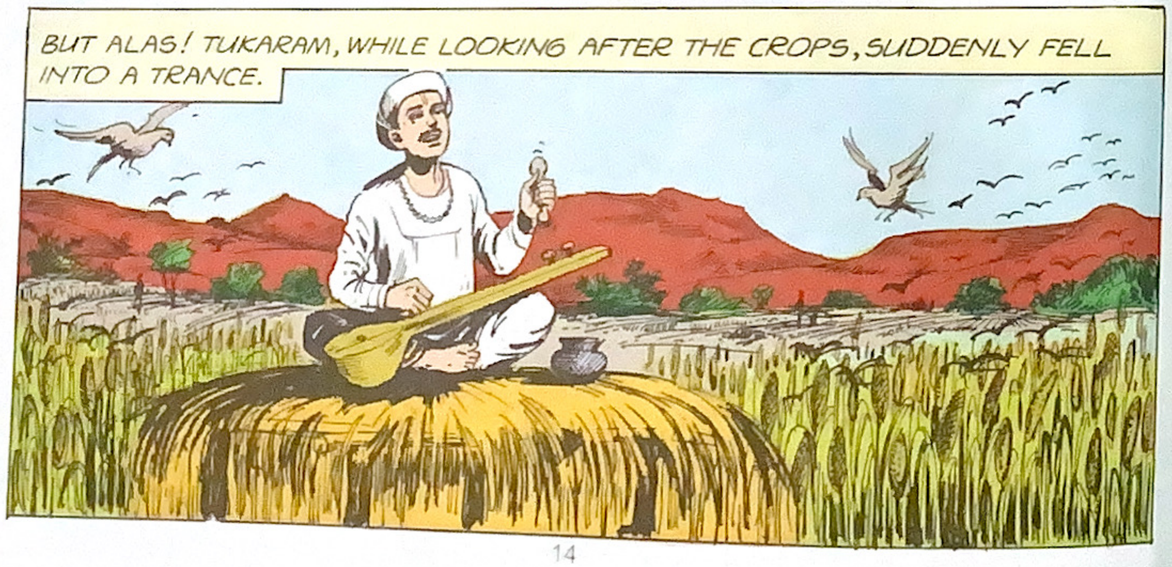
BUT ONCE THEY WERE OUT OF THE JUNGLES–
LORD VITHOBA! YOU...YOU...
BUT BEFORE TUKARAM COULD SAY ANYTHING MORE, THE STRANGER HAD VANISHED.
... YOU REMEMBERED ME, MY LORD!
TUKARAM RODE BACK TO DEHU MORE DEEPLY ENGROSSED THAN EVER IN HIS LORD.
THE NEXT YEAR THE RAINS FAILED AND A TERRIBLE FAMINE HIT THE REGION. AT TUKARAM'S HOUSE–
MAHADEV HAS BEEN CRYING FOR FOOD. I AM SINKING FAST. PLEASE BRING US SOME FOOD.
OH, IT IS USELESS PLEADING WITH HIM. IF HE WERE NOT SO ABSORBED IN VITHOBA WE WOULD NOT STARVE. WE WOULD HAVE HAD MONEY TO BUY GRAINS FROM THE SOUTH.

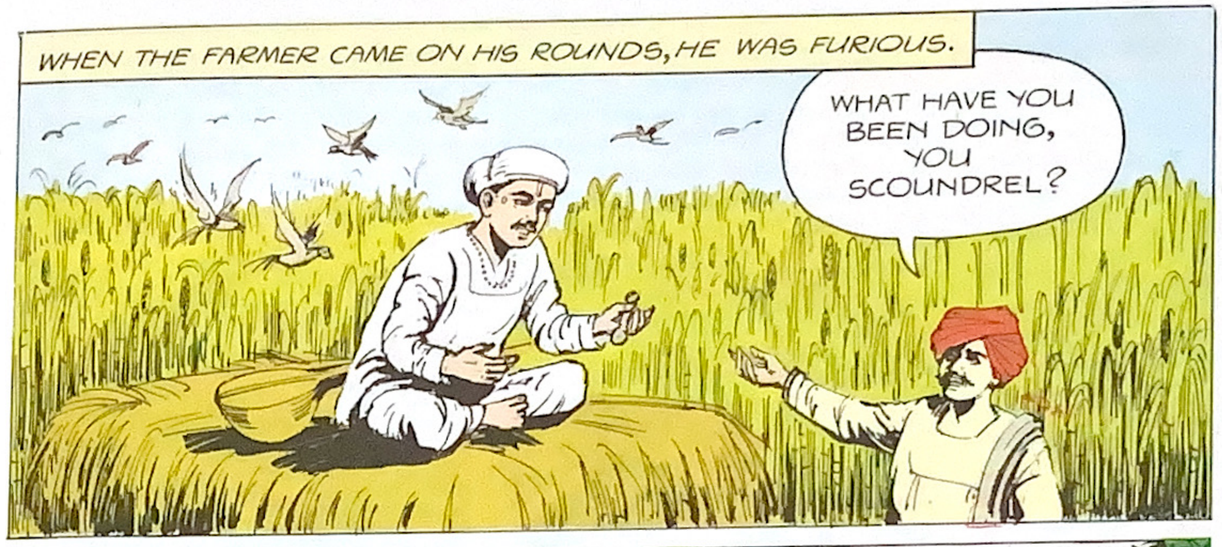
TUKARAM BORE THE CHARGES CALMLY. LATER –
I HAVE TRIED MY BEST, AVALI. OTHER FAMILIES TOO ARE SUFFERING LIKE US. IT IS THE WILL OF GOD.
THE AILING RAKHMA AND MAHADEV COULD NOT HOLD OUT FOR LONG.
AVALI, THEY ARE GONE— DEAD. RAKHMA AND MAHADEV HAVE LEFT US.
DON'T GRIEVE, MY LORD! I AM STILL THERE. I SHALL ALWAYS STAND BY YOU.
TUKARAM WAS TOUCHED.
I KNOW YOU WILL, AVALI. YOU ARE A GOOD WOMAN.

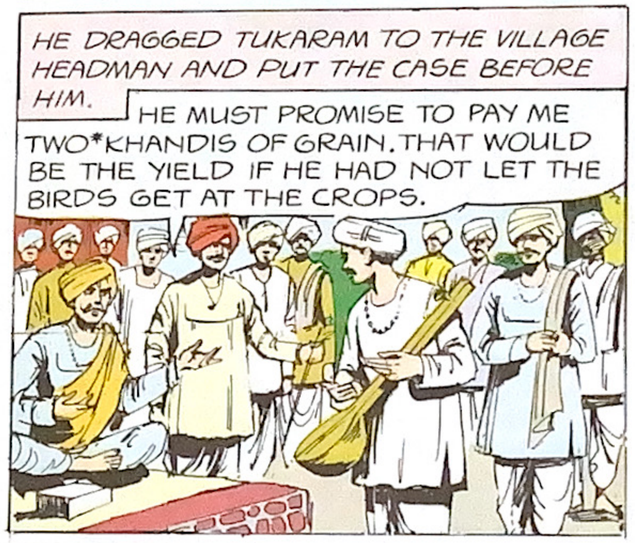








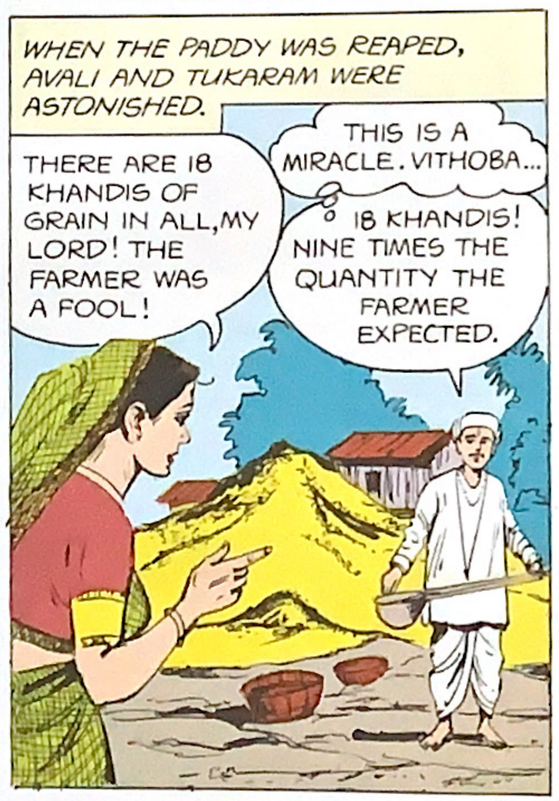


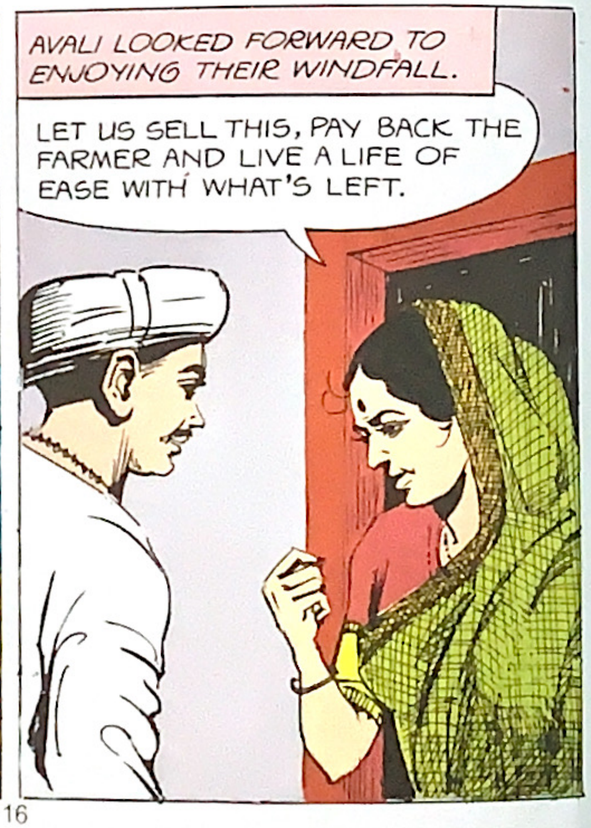


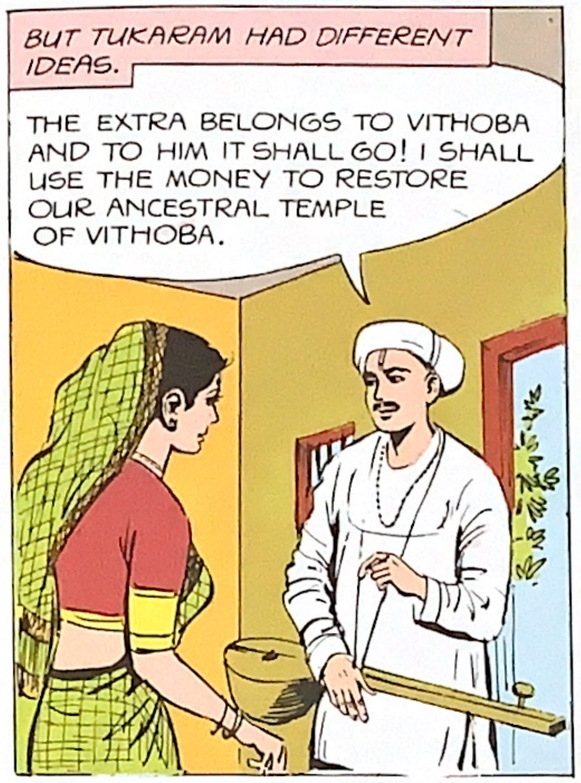
* ROUGHLY 750 KGS.

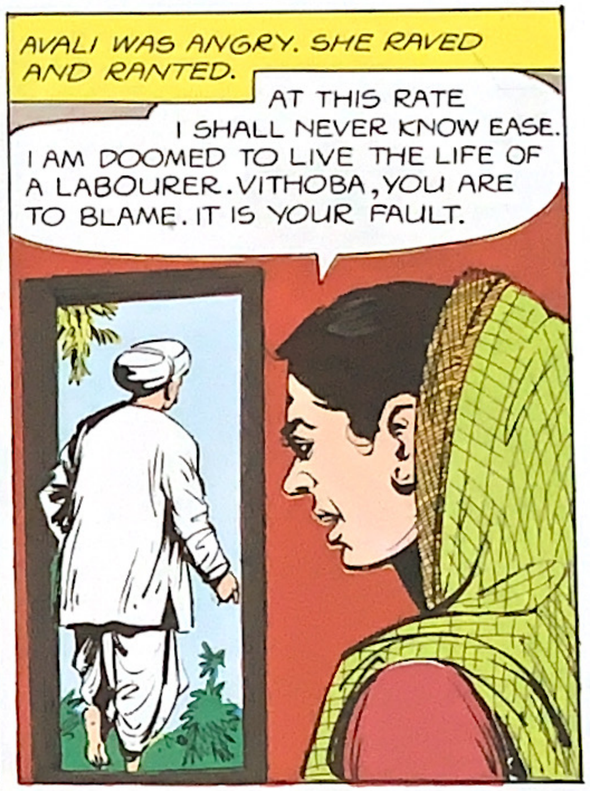
SO THEY BEGAN TO REAP THE CROPS.
AVALI, EVEN IF WE HAD LEFT THIS FOR THE BIRDS WE WOULD NOT HAVE STARVED. VITHOBA WOULD HAVE LOOKED AFTER US.

PLEASED WITH TUKARAM'S FAITH, VITHOBA DECIDED TO REWARD HIM.


WHEN THE PADDY WAS REAPED, AVALI AND TUKARAM WERE ASTONISHED.
THERE ARE 18 KHANDIS OF GRAIN IN ALL, MY LORD! THE FARMER WAS A FOOL!
THIS IS A MIRACLE. VITHOBA...
18 KHANDIS! NINE TIMES THE QUANTITY THE FARMER EXPECTED.


AVALI LOOKED FORWARD TO ENJOYING THEIR WINDFALL.
LET US SELL THIS, PAY BACK THE FARMER AND LIVE A LIFE OF EASE WITH WHAT'S LEFT.


BUT TUKARAM HAD DIFFERENT IDEAS.
THE EXTRA BELONGS TO VITHOBA AND TO HIM IT SHALL GO! I SHALL USE THE MONEY TO RESTORE OUR ANCESTRAL TEMPLE OF VITHOBA.


AVALI WAS ANGRY. SHE RAVED AND RANTED.
AT THIS RATE I SHALL NEVER KNOW EASE. I AM DOOMED TO LIVE THE LIFE OF A LABOURER. VITHOBA, YOU ARE TO BLAME. IT IS YOUR FAULT.

BUT AFTER A WHILE SHE CALMED DOWN AND SIGHED HEAVILY.
WELL, I HAVE PROMISED TO STAND BY MY HUSBAND.

I'LL WRITE TO FATHER AND ASK HIM FOR A LOAN OF TWO HUNDRED RUPEES. THAT SHOULD ENABLE MY HUSBAND TO START HIS TRADING AFRESH.

A FEW DAYS LATER THE MONEY CAME. AVALI WENT UP TO TUKARAM.

DEAR HUSBAND, USE THIS MONEY TO BUY SOME GOODS AND START YOUR TRADE AGAIN.

TUKARAM STARTED OUT WITH EVERY INTENTION OF PLEASING AVALI. BUT ON THE WAY–

WHAT'S THAT COMMOTION?

A GROUP OF PEOPLE WERE BELABOURING A MEEK BRAHMAN.

PAY UP OR ELSE...

AH! PLEASE LEAVE ME. LET ME EXPLAIN.

TUKARAM RAN TO THE BRAHMAN'S AID.

STOP! STOP THIS AT ONCE, I SAY. WHAT HAS HE DONE TO DESERVE THIS?

HE OWES US MONEY AND REFUSES TO PAY.

THE BRAHMAN PROTESTED.

THAT'S NOT TRUE. I WANT TO PAY. BUT I CAN'T.

TUKARAM TURNED TO THE CREDITORS.

HOW MUCH DOES HE OWE YOU?

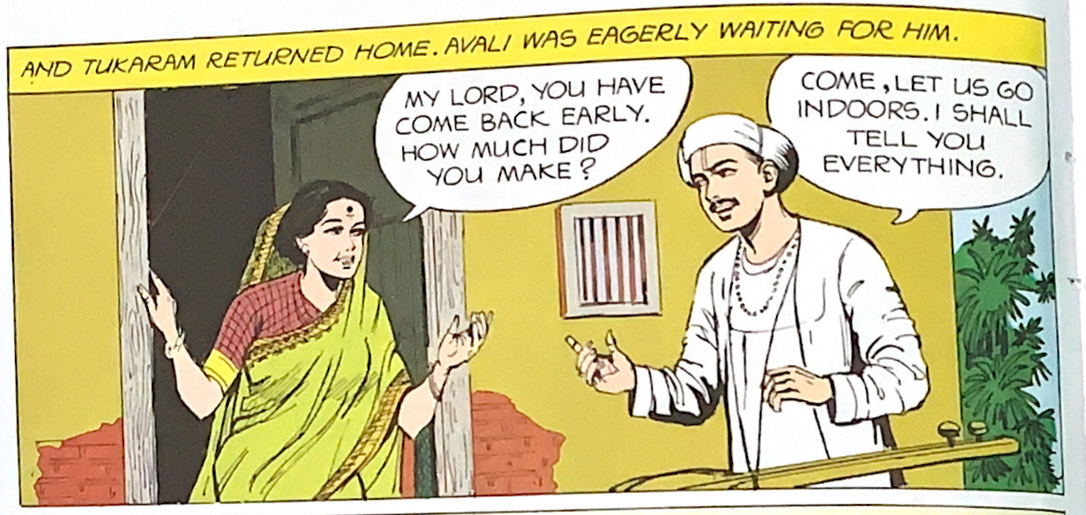
TWO HUNDRED RUPEES IN ALL.

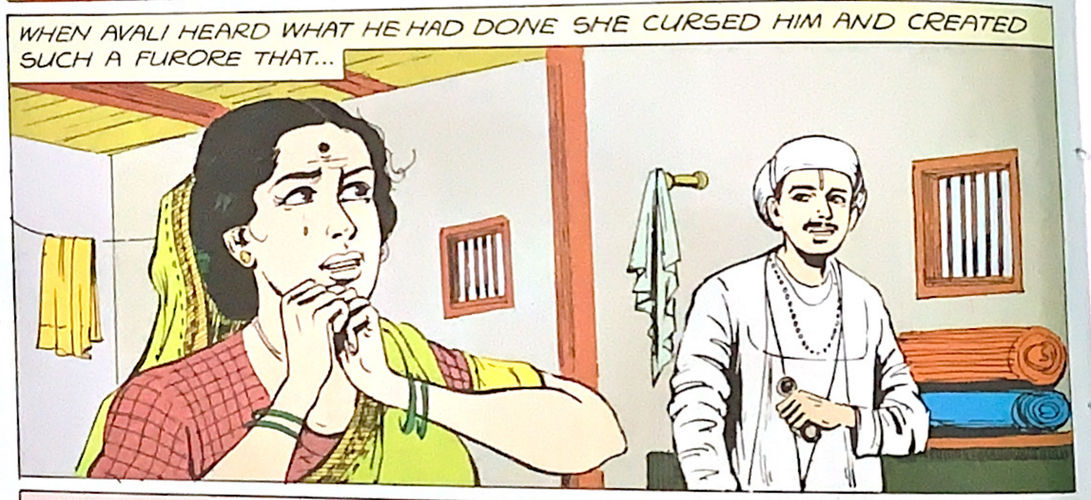
TUKARAM DID NOT HESITATE FOR A MOMENT.

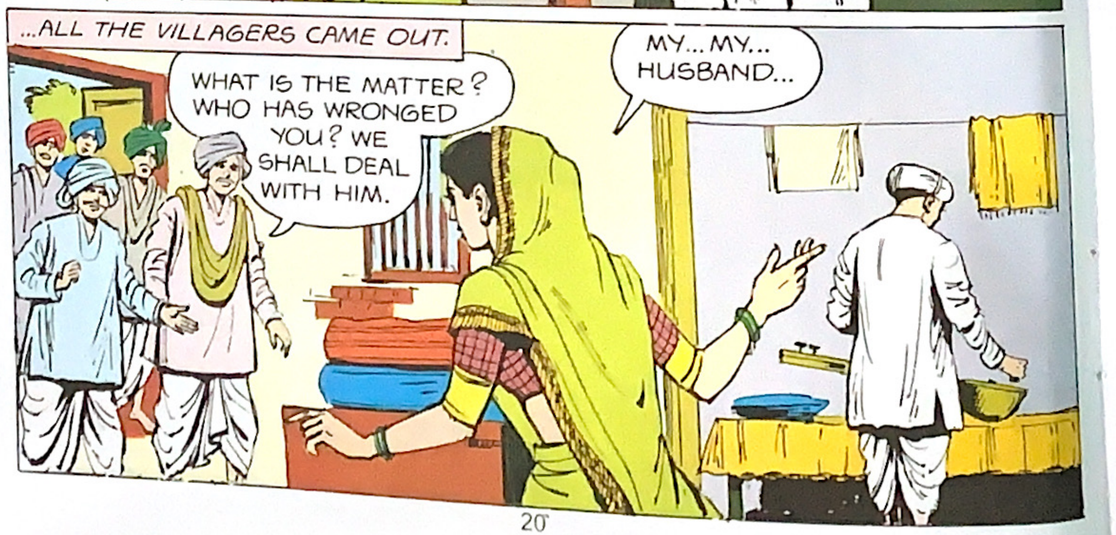
HERE, TAKE THIS AND LEAVE HIM ALONE.

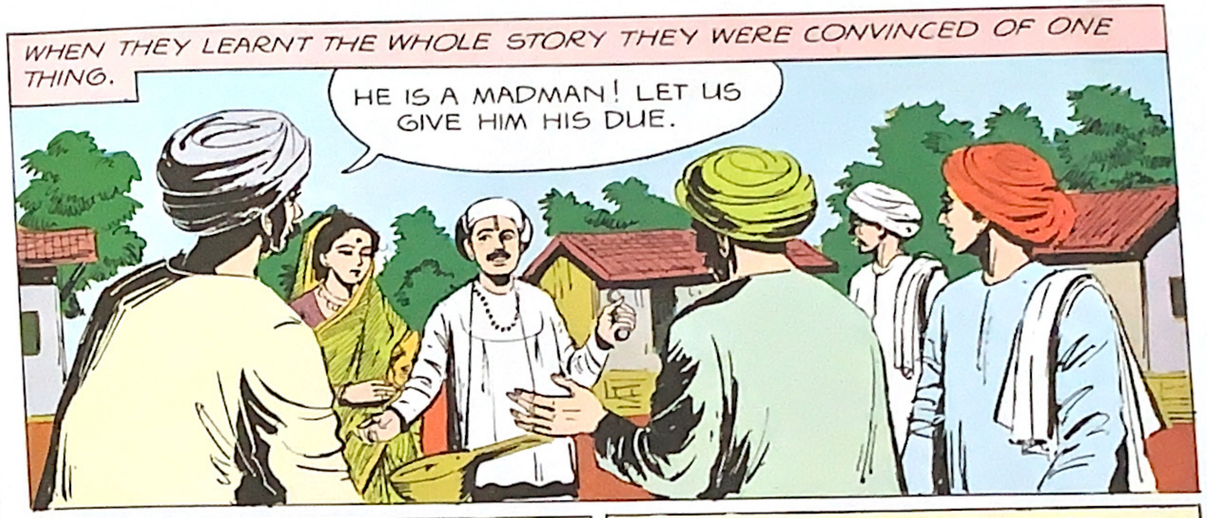
YOU HAVE SAVED MY LIFE. I AM GRATEFUL TO YOU.

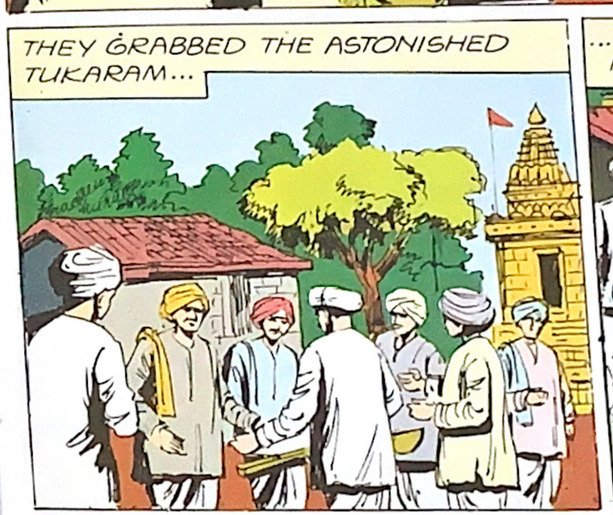
DO NOT BE GRATEFUL TO ME. IT WAS LORD VITHOBA WHO CAME TO YOUR AID. HE GUIDED ME TO YOU. OFFER YOUR THANKS TO HIM.

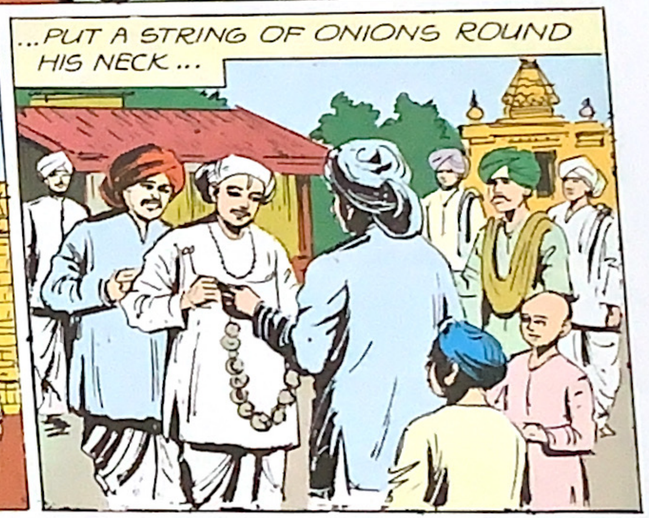

AND TUKARAM RETURNED HOME. AVALI WAS EAGERLY WAITING FOR HIM.
MY LORD, YOU HAVE COME BACK EARLY. HOW MUCH DID YOU MAKE?
COME, LET US GO INDOORS. I SHALL TELL YOU EVERYTHING.

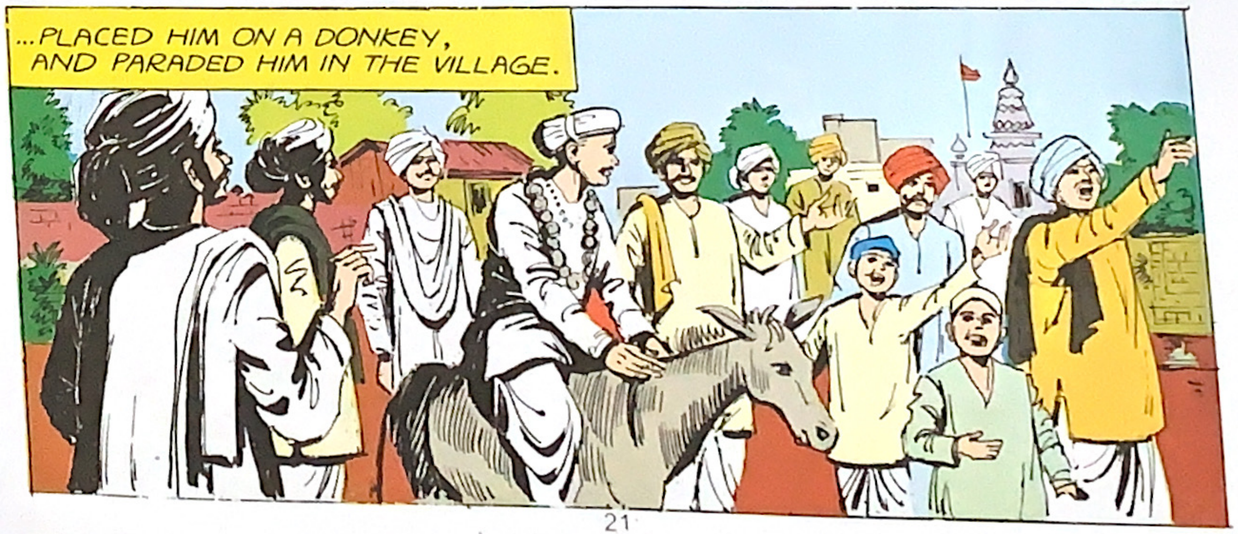

WHEN AVALI HEARD WHAT HE HAD DONE SHE CURSED HIM AND CREATED SUCH A FURORE THAT...


...ALL THE VILLAGERS CAME OUT.
WHAT IS THE MATTER? WHO HAS WRONGED YOU? WE SHALL DEAL WITH HIM.
MY... MY... HUSBAND...

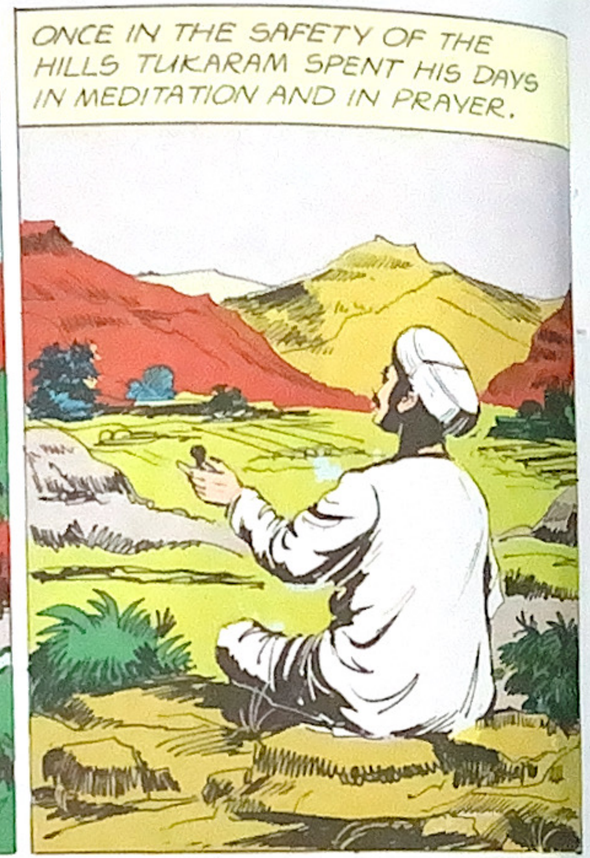

WHEN THEY LEARNT THE WHOLE STORY THEY WERE CONVINCED OF ONE THING.
HE IS A MADMAN! LET US GIVE HIM HIS DUE.


THEY GRABBED THE ASTONISHED TUKARAM...


...PUT A STRING OF ONIONS ROUND HIS NECK...

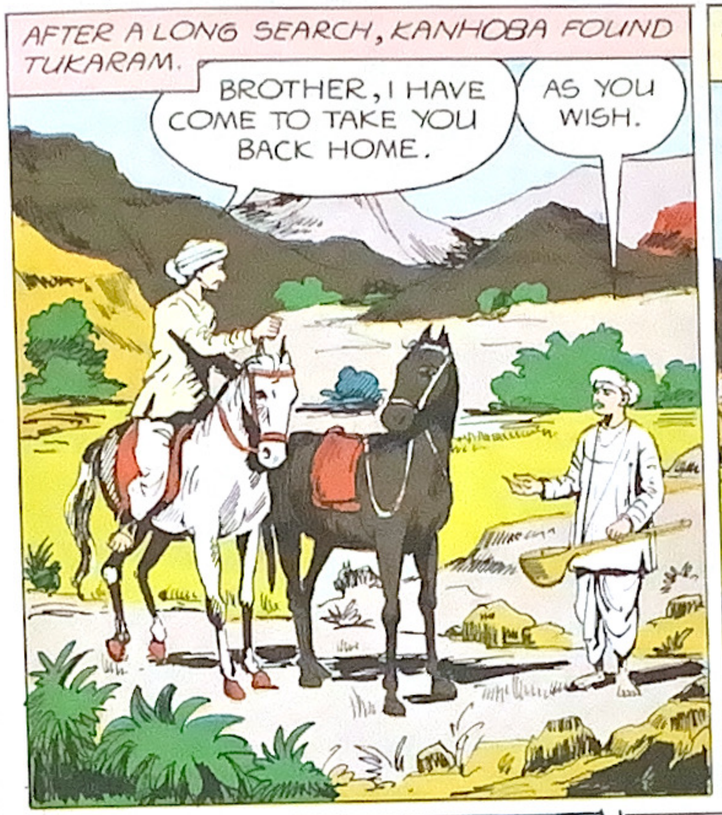

...PLACED HIM ON A DONKEY, AND PARADED HIM IN THE VILLAGE.

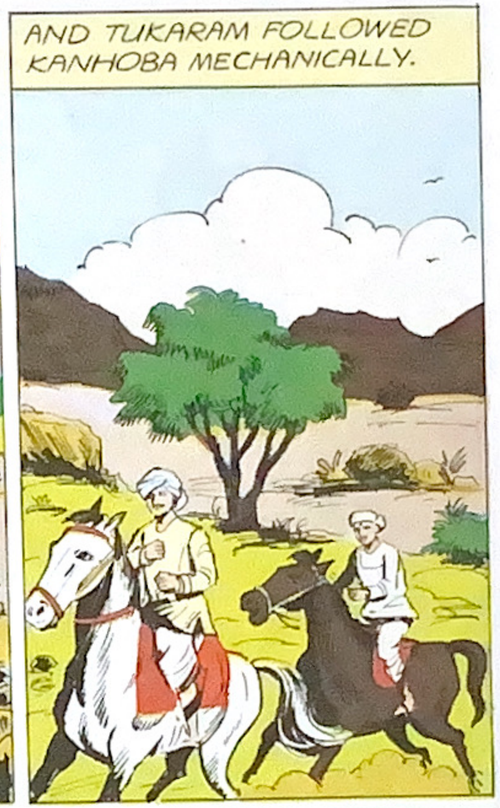
THE MISERABLE TUKARAM SOMEHOW MANAGED TO SHAKE OFF HIS TORMENTORS.
I'D BETTER RUN AWAY TO THE HILLS. THEY WILL NOT FOLLOW ME THERE.

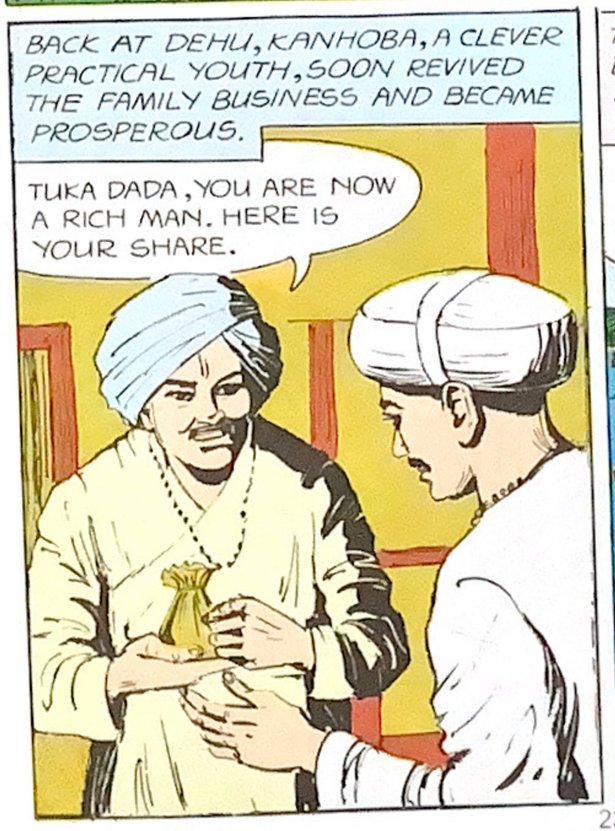

ONCE IN THE SAFETY OF THE HILLS TUKARAM SPENT HIS DAYS IN MEDITATION AND IN PRAYER.

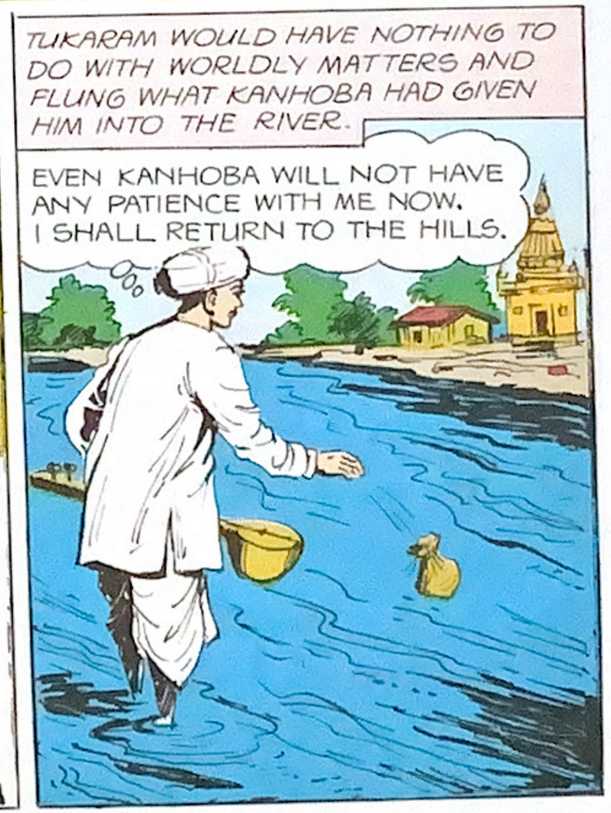
MEANWHILE, AVALI RETURNED HOME. KANHOBA WAS WAITING FOR HER.
WHY ARE YOU WEEPING? WHERE IS TUKA DADA?

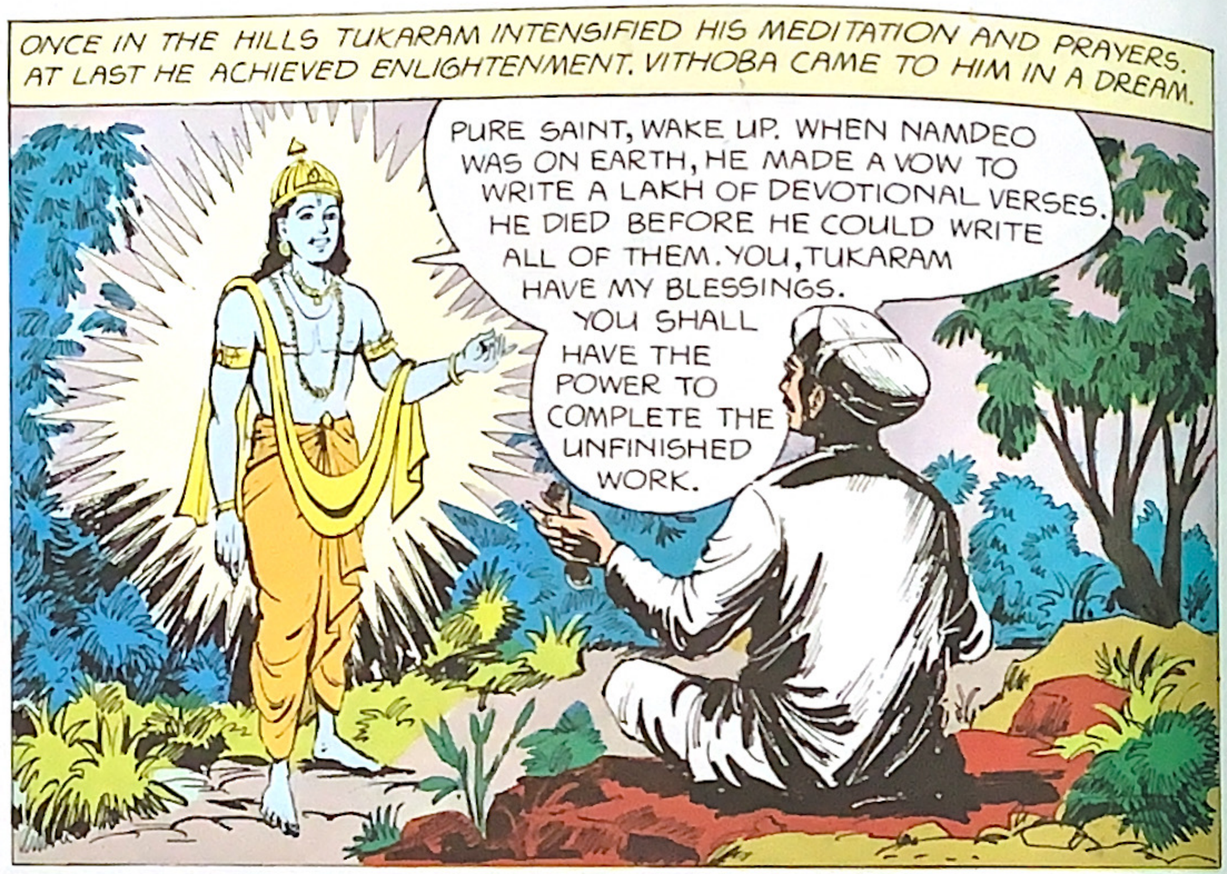
AVALI BROKE DOWN AND TOLD HIM ALL THAT HAD HAPPENED.
DEAR BROTHER, WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO YOU? I SHALL FIND YOU AND BRING YOU BACK IN HONOUR.

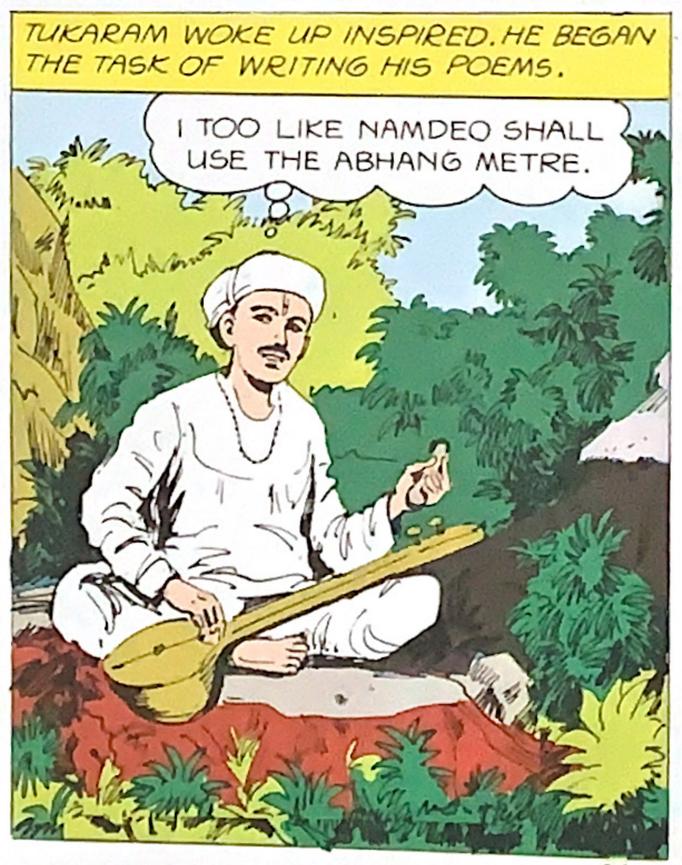

AFTER A LONG SEARCH, KANHOBA FOUND TUKARAM.
BROTHER, I HAVE COME TO TAKE YOU BACK HOME.
AS YOU WISH.

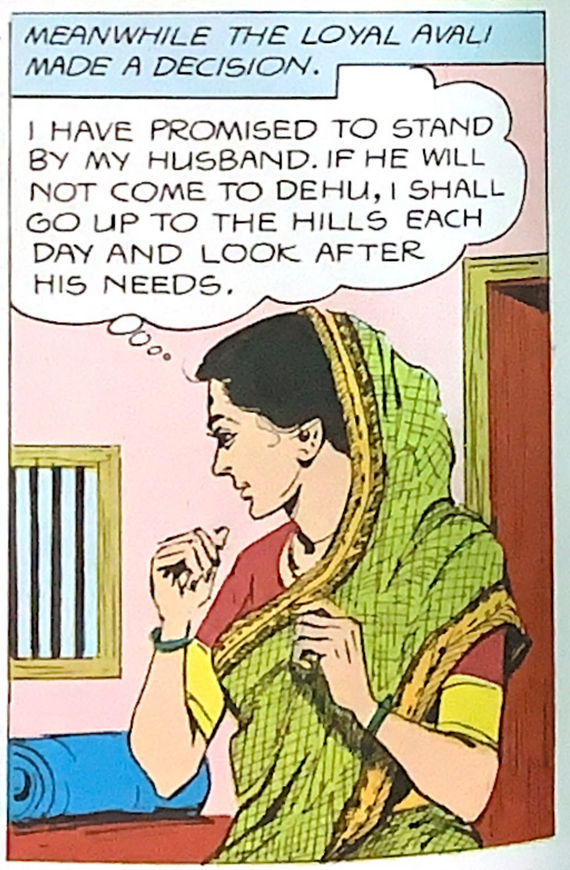

AND TUKARAM FOLLOWED KANHOBA MECHANICALLY.

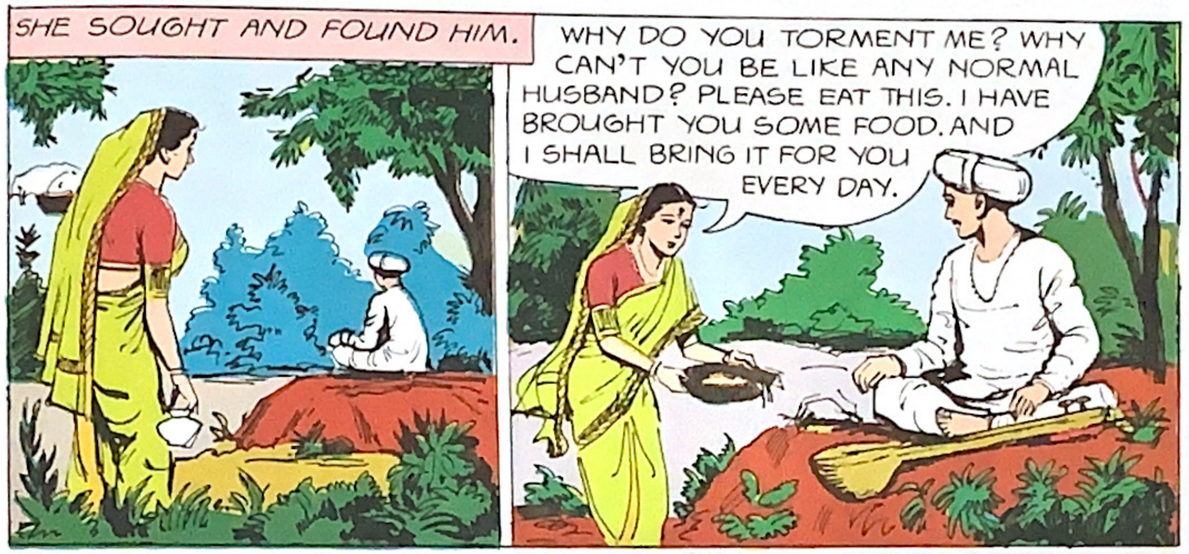

BACK AT DEHU, KANHOBA, A CLEVER PRACTICAL YOUTH, SOON REVIVED THE FAMILY BUSINESS AND BECAME PROSPEROUS.
TUKA DADA, YOU ARE NOW A RICH MAN. HERE IS YOUR SHARE.

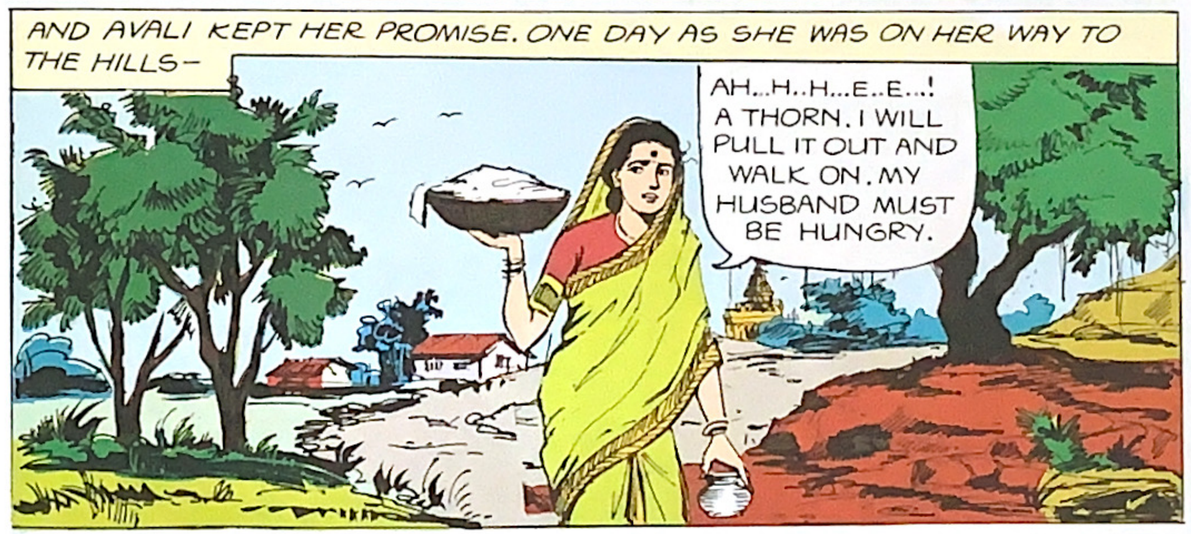

TUKARAM WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH WORLDLY MATTERS AND FLUNG WHAT KANHOBA HAD GIVEN HIM INTO THE RIVER.
EVEN KANHOBA WILL NOT HAVE ANY PATIENCE WITH ME NOW. I SHALL RETURN TO THE HILLS.

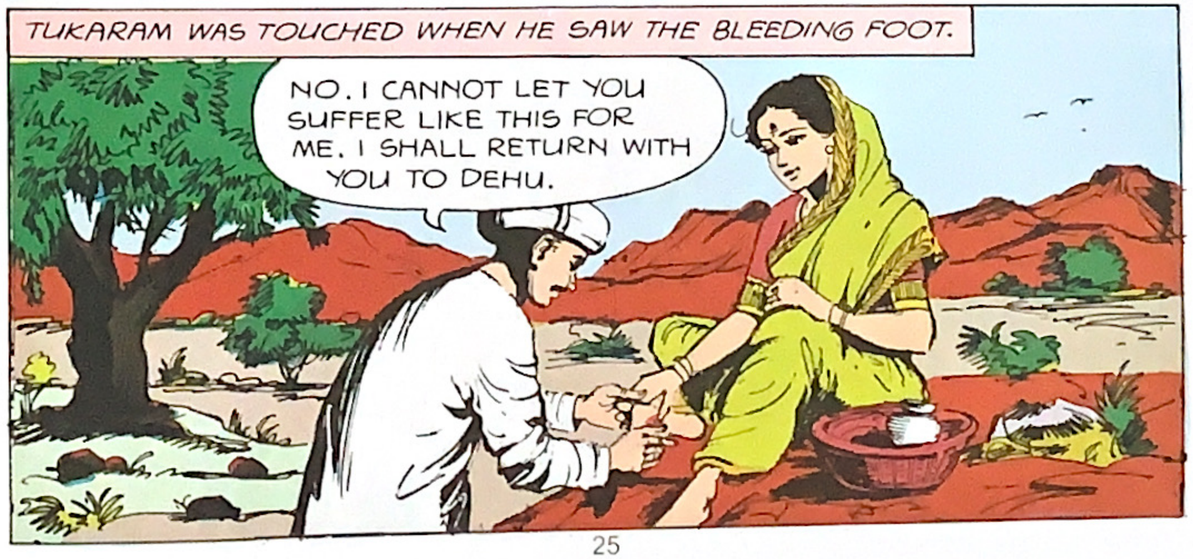

ONCE IN THE HILLS TUKARAM INTENSIFIED HIS MEDITATION AND PRAYERS. AT LAST HE ACHIEVED ENLIGHTENMENT. VITHOBA CAME TO HIM IN A DREAM.
PURE SAINT, WAKE UP. WHEN NAMDEO WAS ON EARTH, HE MADE A VOW TO WRITE A LAKH OF DEVOTIONAL VERSES. HE DIED BEFORE HE COULD WRITE ALL OF THEM. YOU, TUKARAM HAVE MY BLESSINGS. YOU SHALL HAVE THE POWER TO COMPLETE THE UNFINISHED WORK.

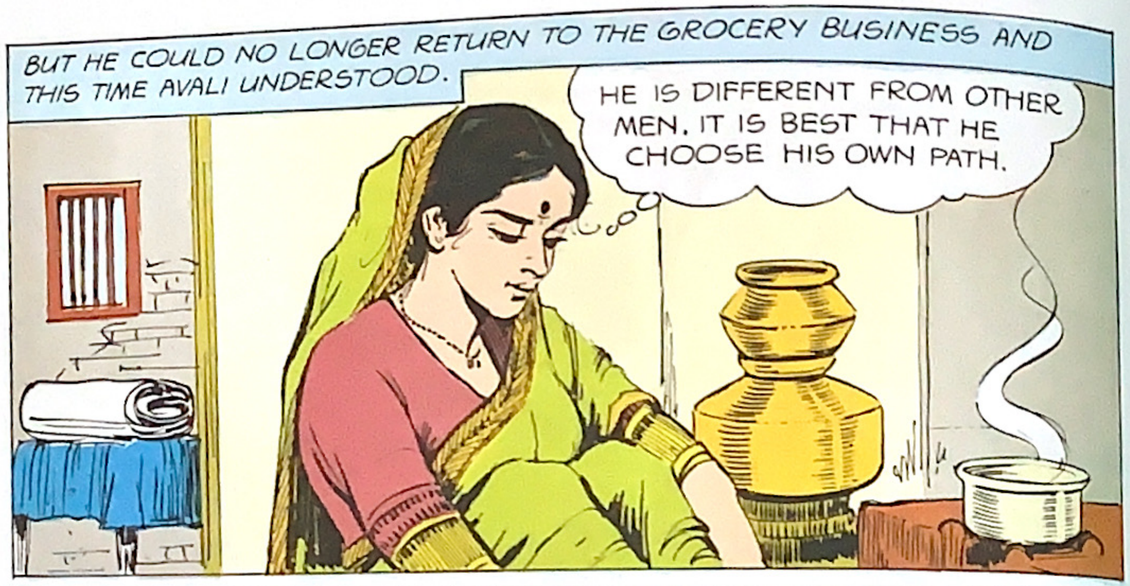

TUKARAM WOKE UP INSPIRED. HE BEGAN THE TASK OF WRITING HIS POEMS.
I TOO LIKE NAMDEO SHALL USE THE ABHANG METRE.

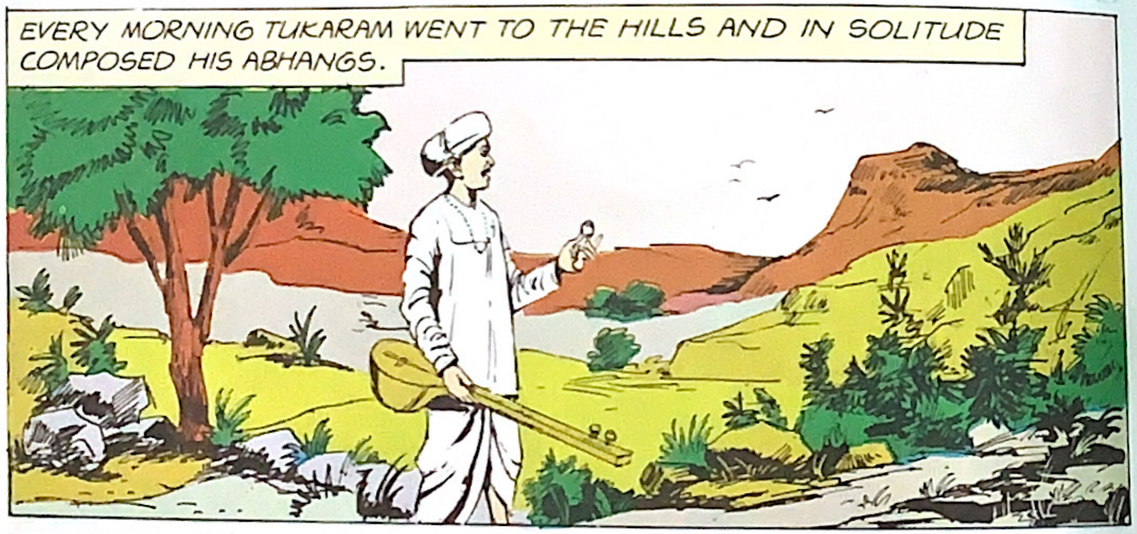

MEANWHILE THE LOYAL AVALI MADE A DECISION.
I HAVE PROMISED TO STAND BY MY HUSBAND. IF HE WILL NOT COME TO DEHU, I SHALL GO UP TO THE HILLS EACH DAY AND LOOK AFTER HIS NEEDS.

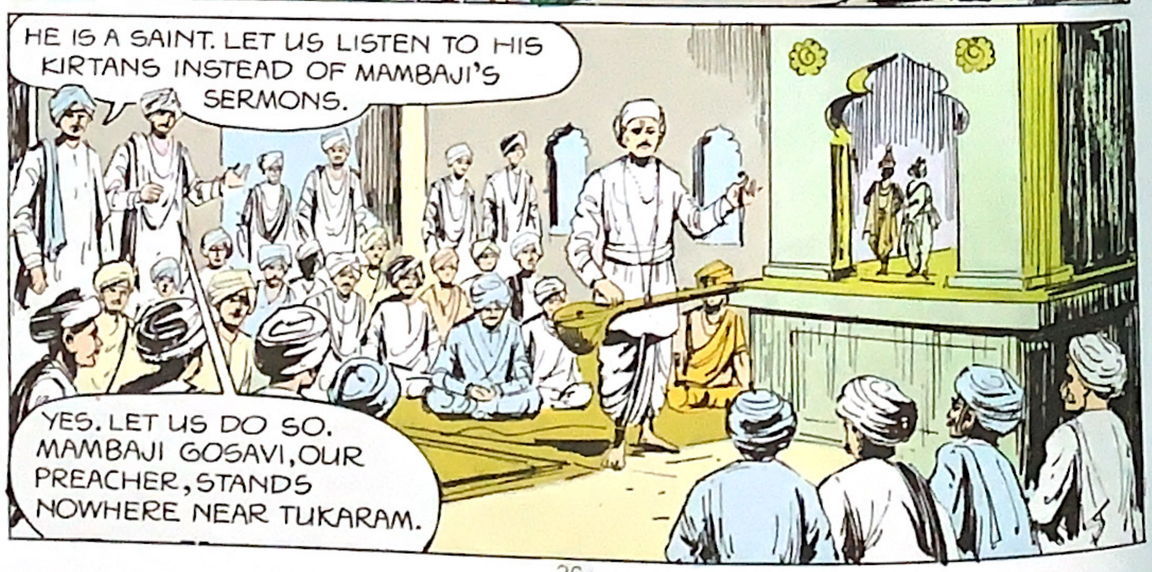

SHE SOUGHT AND FOUND HIM.
WHY DO YOU TORMENT ME? WHY CAN'T YOU BE LIKE ANY NORMAL HUSBAND? PLEASE EAT THIS. I HAVE BROUGHT YOU SOME FOOD. AND I SHALL BRING IT FOR YOU EVERY DAY.

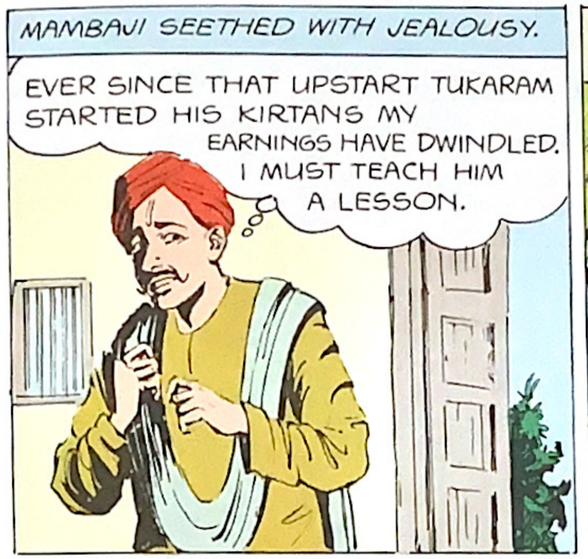

AND AVALI KEPT HER PROMISE. ONE DAY AS SHE WAS ON HER WAY TO THE HILLS–
AH...H..H...E..E...! A THORN. I WILL PULL IT OUT AND WALK ON. MY HUSBAND MUST BE HUNGRY.

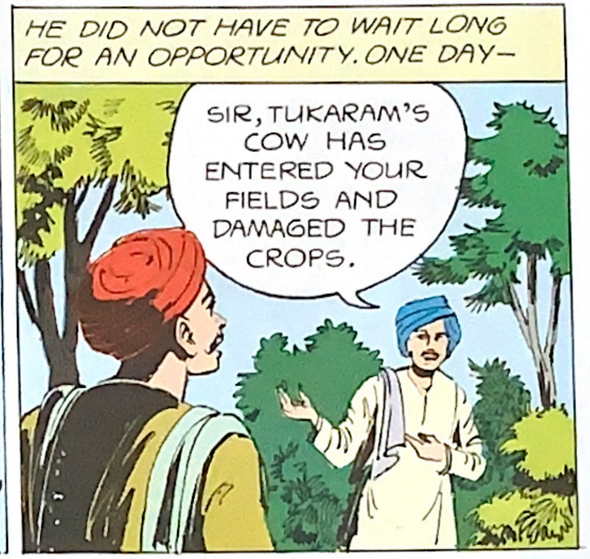

TUKARAM WAS TOUCHED WHEN HE SAW THE BLEEDING FOOT.
NO. I CANNOT LET YOU SUFFER LIKE THIS FOR ME. I SHALL RETURN WITH YOU TO DEHU.

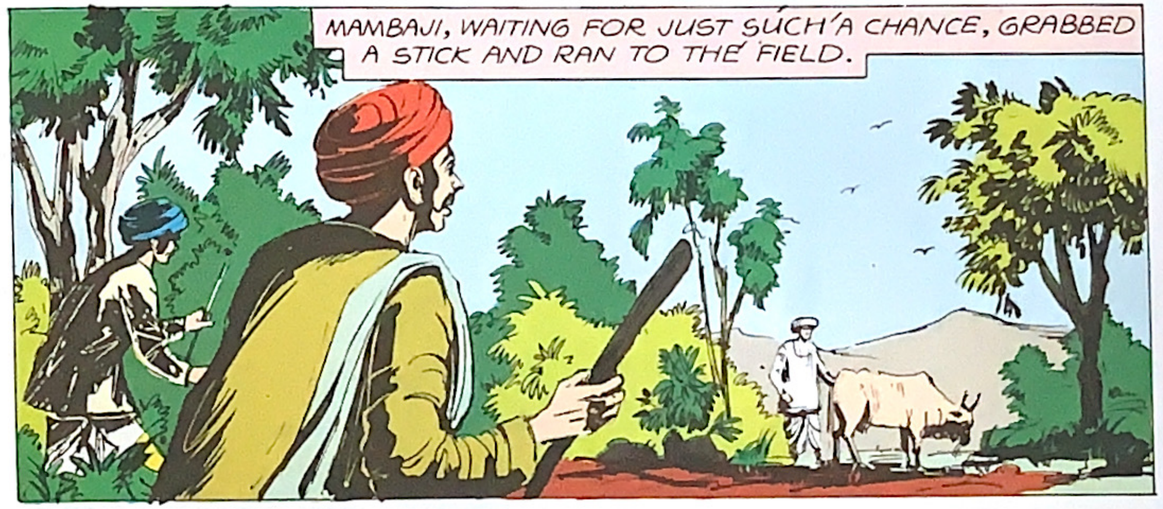

BUT HE COULD NO LONGER RETURN TO THE GROCERY BUSINESS AND THIS TIME AVALI UNDERSTOOD.
HE IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER MEN. IT IS BEST THAT HE CHOOSE HIS OWN PATH.

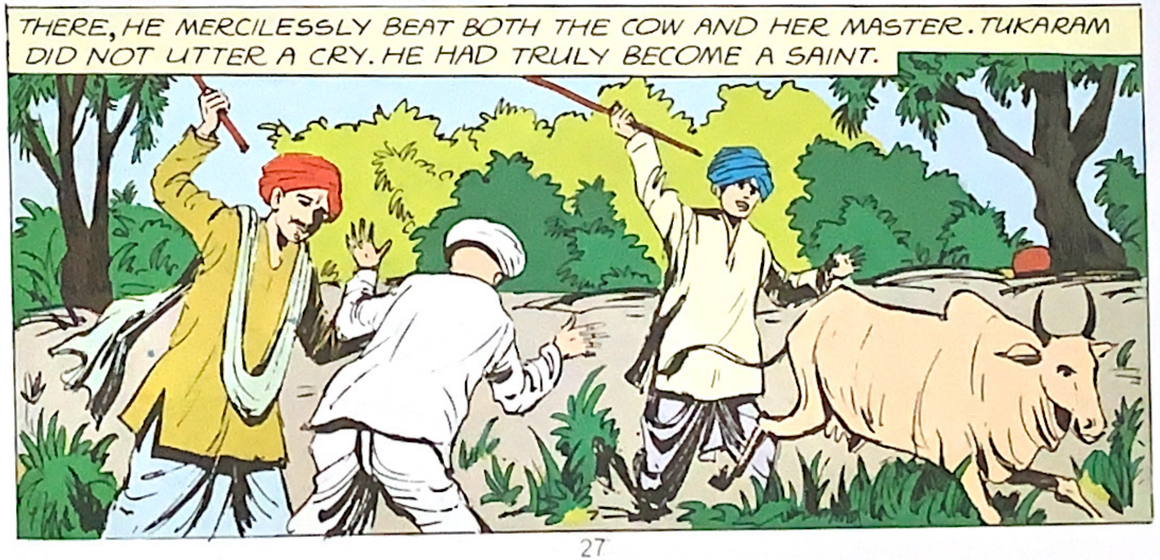

EVERY MORNING TUKARAM WENT TO THE HILLS AND IN SOLITUDE COMPOSED HIS ABHANGS.

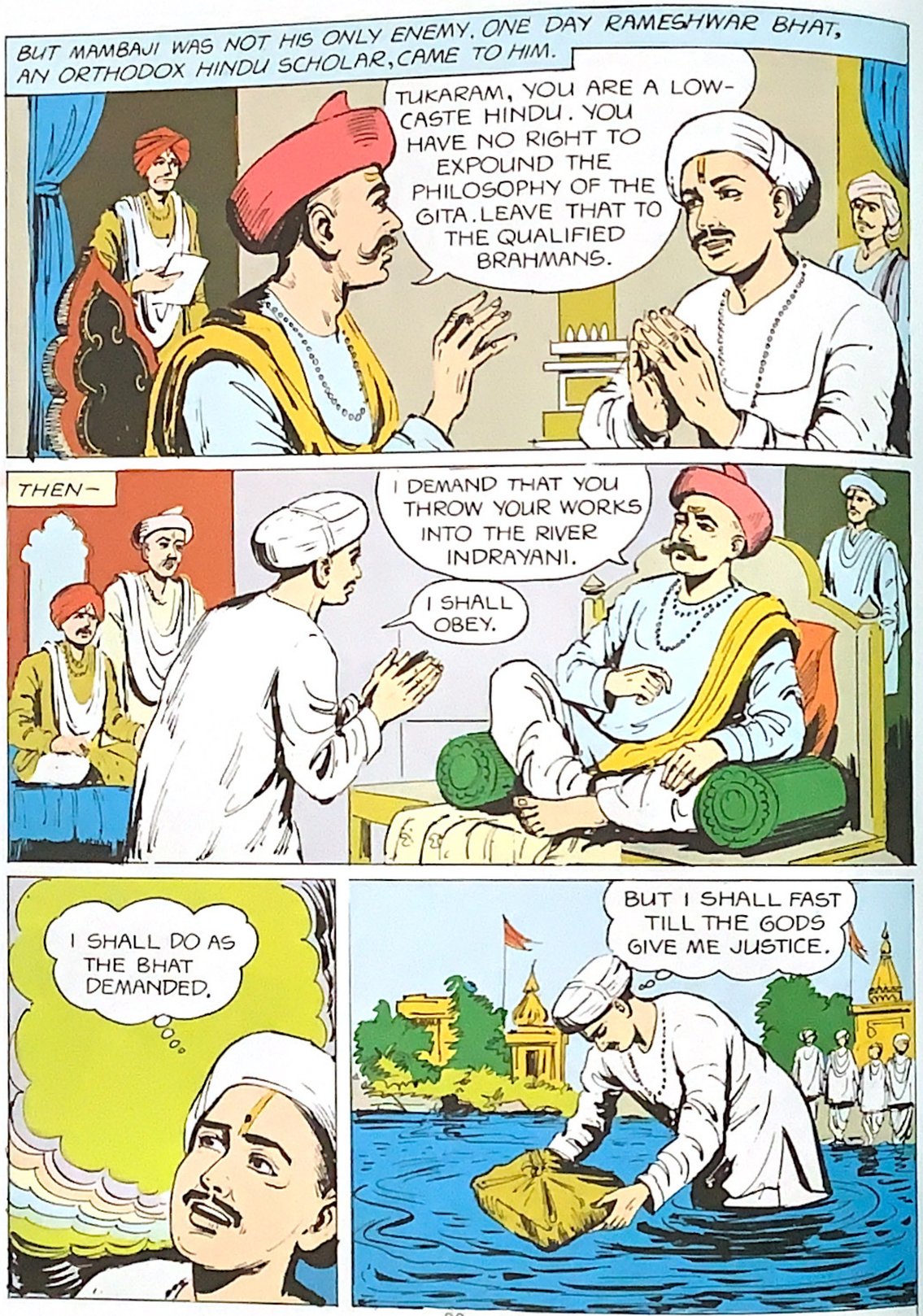

HE IS A SAINT. LET US LISTEN TO HIS KIRTANS INSTEAD OF MAMBAJI'S SERMONS.
YES. LET US DO SO. MAMBAJI GOSAVI, OUR PREACHER, STANDS NOWHERE NEAR TUKARAM.


MAMBAJI SEETHED WITH JEALOUSY.
EVER SINCE THAT UPSTART TUKARAM STARTED HIS KIRTANS MY EARNINGS HAVE DWINDLED. I MUST TEACH HIM A LESSON.


HE DID NOT HAVE TO WAIT LONG FOR AN OPPORTUNITY. ONE DAY—
SIR, TUKARAM'S COW HAS ENTERED YOUR FIELDS AND DAMAGED THE CROPS.


MAMBAJI, WAITING FOR JUST SUCH A CHANCE, GRABBED A STICK AND RAN TO THE FIELD.


THERE, HE MERCILESSLY BEAT BOTH THE COW AND HER MASTER. TUKARAM DID NOT UTTER A CRY. HE HAD TRULY BECOME A SAINT.


BUT MAMBAJI WAS NOT HIS ONLY ENEMY. ONE DAY RAMESHWAR BHAT, AN ORTHODOX HINDU SCHOLAR, CAME TO HIM.
TUKARAM, YOU ARE A LOW-CASTE HINDU. YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO EXPOUND THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE GITA. LEAVE THAT TO THE QUALIFIED BRAHMANS.
THEN–
I DEMAND THAT YOU THROW YOUR WORKS INTO THE RIVER INDRAYANI.
I SHALL OBEY.
I SHALL DO AS THE BHAT DEMANDED.
BUT I SHALL FAST TILL THE GODS GIVE ME JUSTICE.

AND TUKARAM BEGAN HIS FAST ON THE RIVER BANK.
TWELVE DAYS LATER–
I AM INDRAYANI, GODDESS OF THIS RIVER. MOVED BY YOUR DEVOTION, I HAVE COME TO RESTORE YOUR WORK TO YOU.
WHEN RAMESHWAR BHAT HEARD OF THIS, HE CAME AND FELL AT TUKARAM'S FEET.
MASTER, WILL YOU ACCEPT ME AS YOUR DISCIPLE?
AND SO TUKARAM CONTINUED TEACHING AND PREACHING.

TUKARAM AND HIS ABHANGS BECAME SO FAMOUS THAT EVEN THE GREAT SHIVAJI BECAME HIS DISCIPLE. ONE DAY-

WILL YOU RECITE A KATHA IN THE TEMPLE IN POONA, WHERE I USED TO WORSHIP AS A CHILD?

WITH PLEASURE, SIR. PLEASE HAVE THE ARRANGEMENTS MADE.

SHIVAJI, THEY SAY, IS AT THE TEMPLE, UNARMED AND WITHOUT HIS GUARDS.

GOOD. SURROUND THE TEMPLE AND SEARCH FOR HIM IN THE AUDIENCE.

AS THEY SEARCHED FOR SHIVAJI, IN THE AUDIENCE, SUDDENLY-

DON'T LET HIM GO. CATCH HIM!

THEY GAVE CHASE BUT NEVER SUCCEEDED IN CATCHING HIM. FOR IT WAS VITHOBA WHO HAD ONCE AGAIN COME TO PROTECT HIS DEVOTEE.

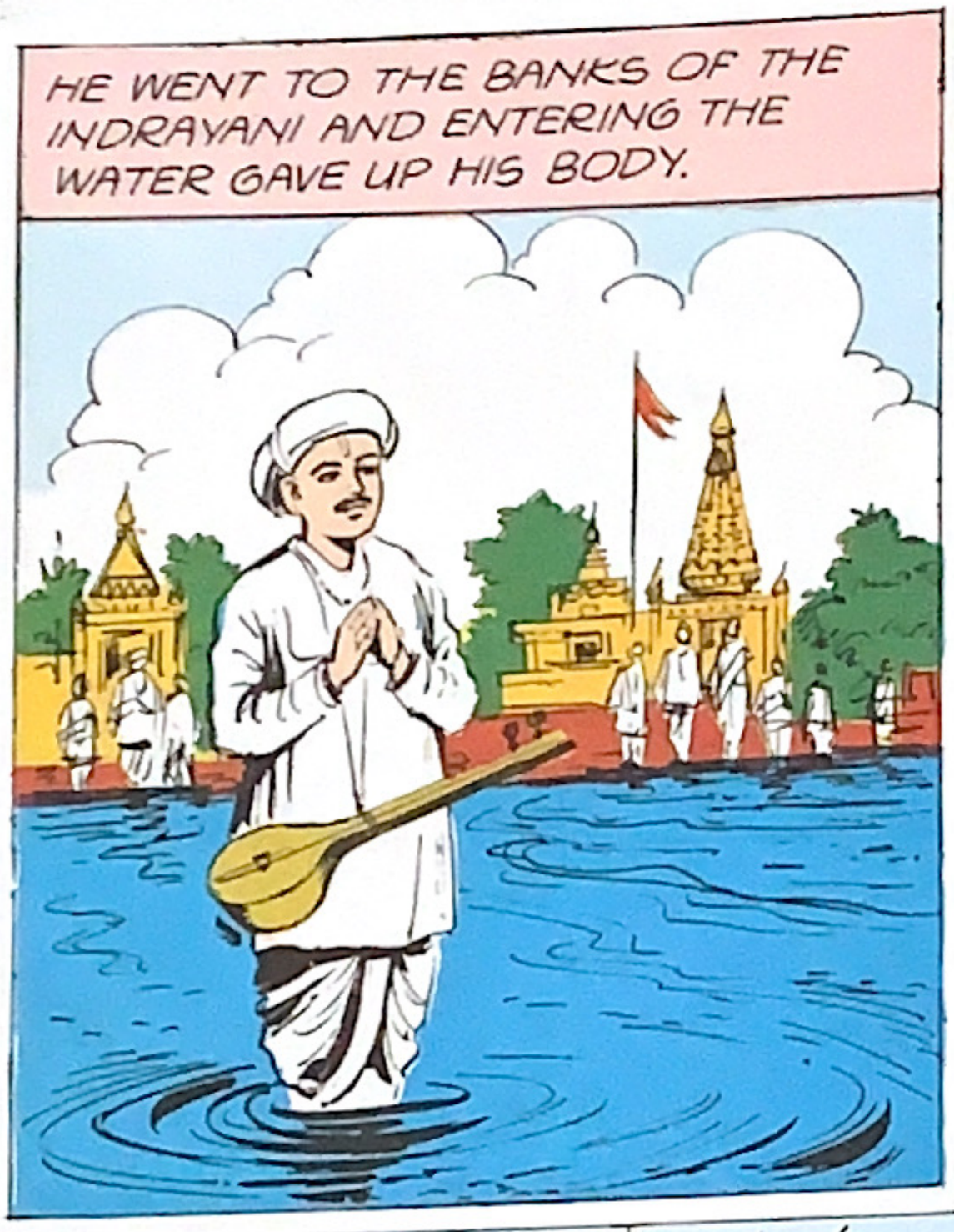
I SHALL LEAD THEM INTO THE FORESTS, WHERE I SHALL DISAPPEAR. THAT WILL PERPLEX THEM.

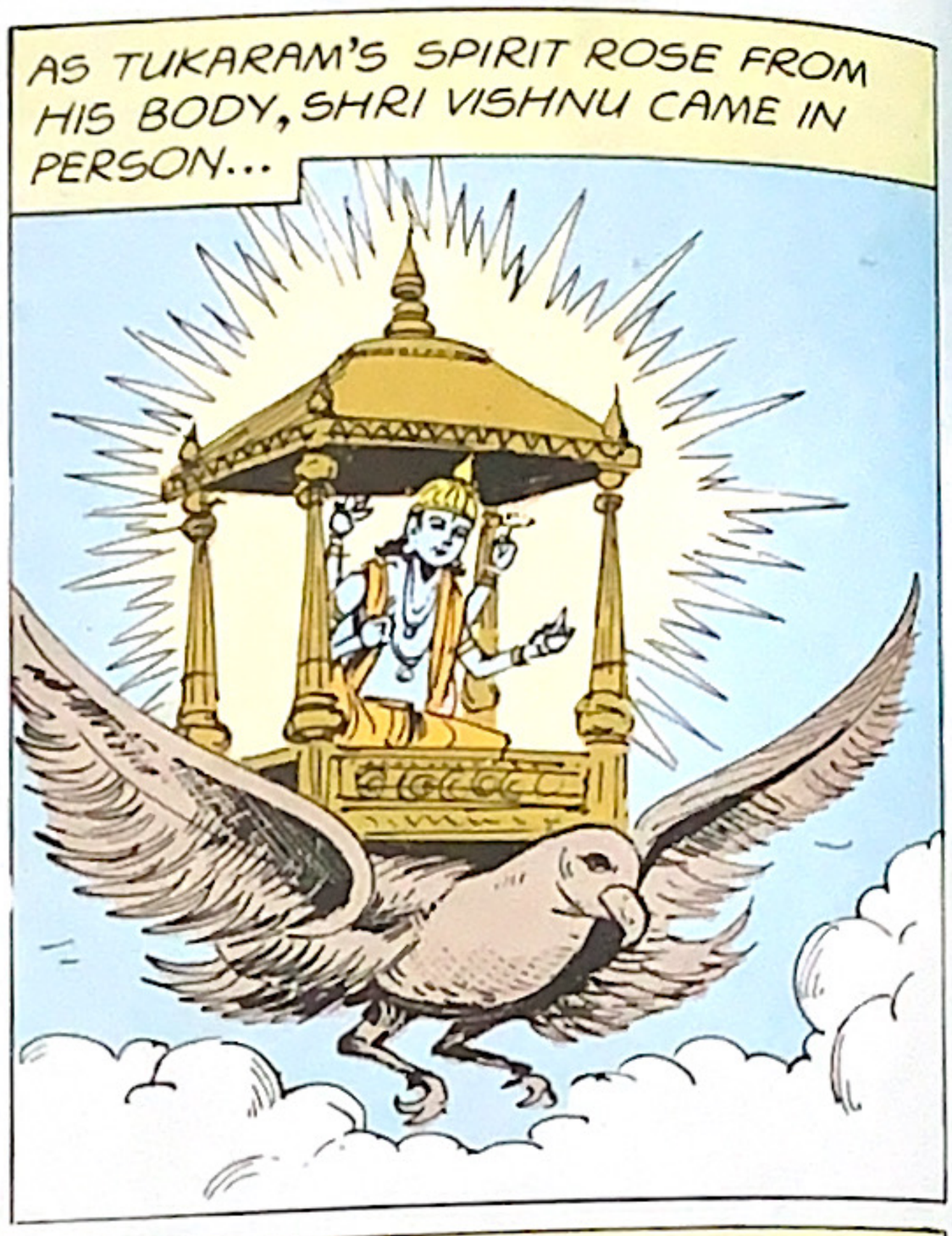
MEANWHILE TUKARAM CONTINUED WITH HIS KATHA.

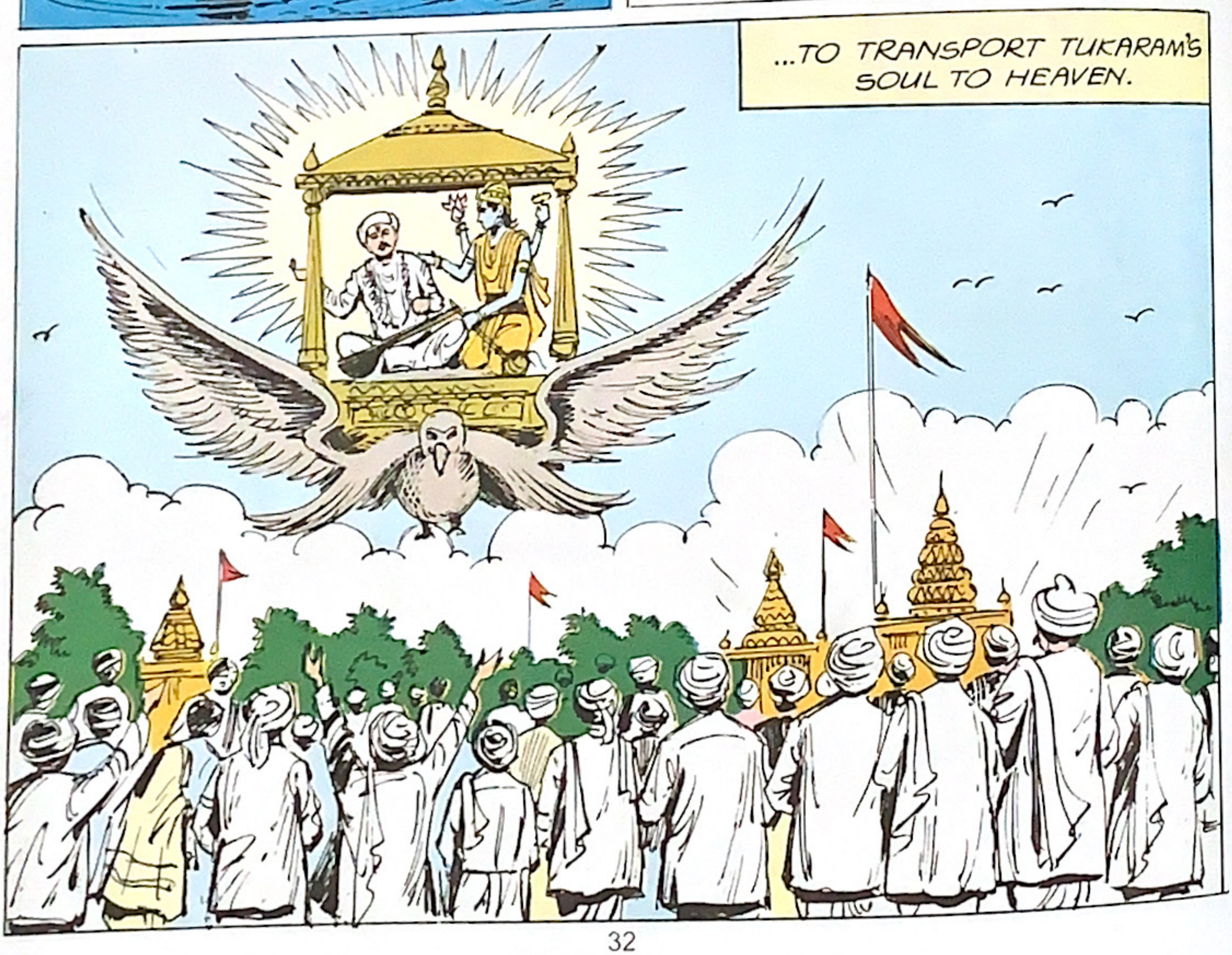
WHEN IT WAS OVER, SHIVAJI RETURNED HOME UNMOLESTED.

TUKARAM TAUGHT AND PREACHED FOR MANY YEARS. THEN SUDDENLY ONE FINE MORNING-

AVALI, I HAVE COME TO BID YOU FAREWELL. I AM GOING TO VAIKUNTHA.


HE WENT TO THE BANKS OF THE INDRAYANI AND ENTERING THE WATER GAVE UP HIS BODY.


AS TUKARAM'S SPIRIT ROSE FROM HIS BODY, SHRI VISHNU CAME IN PERSON...


...TO TRANSPORT TUKARAM'S SOUL TO HEAVEN.

AMAR CHITRA KATHA

TYAGARAJA

POET-SAINT AND SOCIAL ACTIVIST